

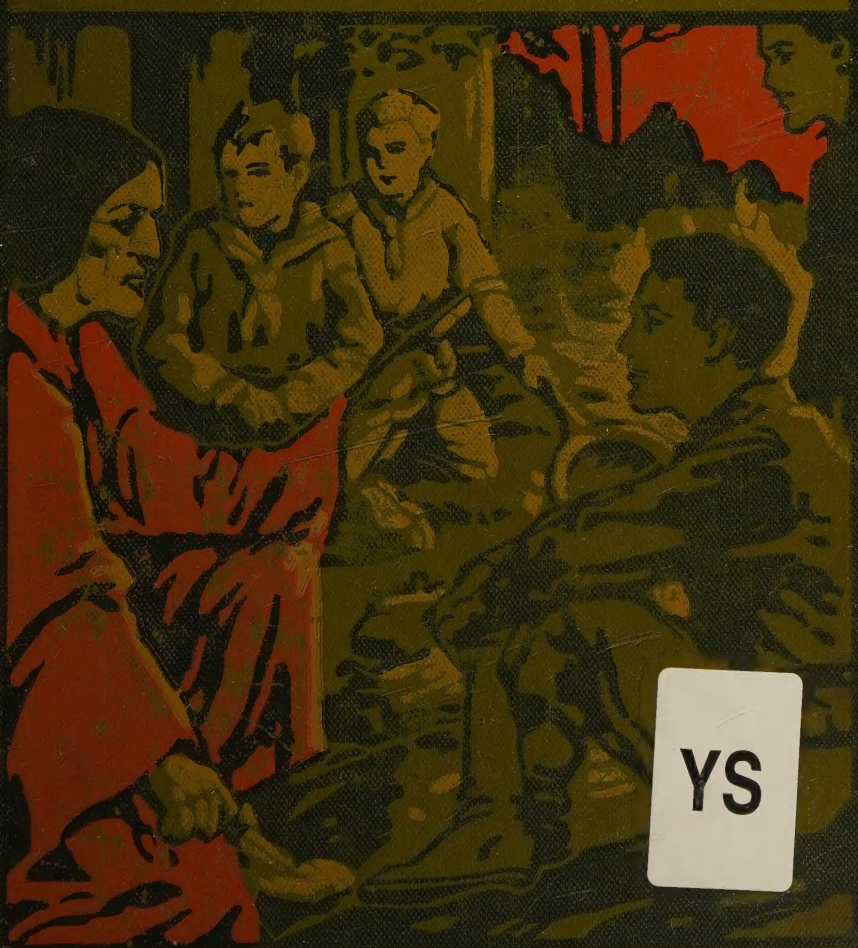
THE

S. EEE'S
WARNING

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D. LANGE



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THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

**"INDIAN" STORIES
WITH HISTORICAL BASES**

By D. LANGE

12mo Cloth Illustrated

**ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX
THE SILVER ISLAND OF THE
CHIPPEWA**

**LOST IN THE FUR COUNTRY
IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH
THE LURE OF THE BLACK HILLS**

**THE LURE OF THE MISSISSIPPI
THE SILVER CACHE OF THE PAWNEE**

**THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING
THE THREAT OF SITTING BULL
THE RAID OF THE OTTAWA**

**THE MOHAWK RANGER
THE IROQUOIS SCOUT
THE SIOUX RUNNER**

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO., BOSTON

THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

A Story of the Oregon Trail

BY

D. LANGE

AUTHOR OF "IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH," "LOST IN THE FUR
COUNTRY," "THE LURE OF THE MISSISSIPPI," "THE
SILVER CACHE OF THE PAWNEE," ETC.

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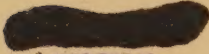
BOSTON

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LOCAL AUTHORS

Published, October, 1919


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THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

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GIFT
LOCAL AUTHORS

FOREWORD

The history of the United States is that of a young giant among nations.

Many phases connected with our growth have been unique and can never be repeated in the life of any other nation, because there is no other continent like North America on the face of the earth.

Many phases of our national life have passed rapidly into history like scenes of a big film story.

Among those national scenes are the Fur Trade of the Far West and the Settlement of Oregon.

It is on these two scenes that the present story is based.

The American Fur Company and the Hudson Bay Company were the two great corporations engaged in the trade of buffalo robes, beaver fur and many other kinds of peltries.

The business was carried on principally among the wild Indian tribes of the plains

and the mountains. To the picturesque life of the Indians, the brave Independent Trappers added another element full of adventure and romance.

The greatest days of the western fur trade ended with the emigration to Oregon, which began on a large scale in 1843.

This is the time chosen for our story, the scenes of which are laid among the wild Indian tribes and the adventurous bands of Independent Trappers of the plains and the mountains; and on the long Oregon Trail, which extended from Fort Leavenworth, Independence, and other Missouri River points to the Columbia and the Willamette.

D. LANGE.

St. Paul, Minnesota,
June, 1919.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
TWO BOYS AND A DOG	11
CHAPTER II	
A BIG PROBLEM	17
CHAPTER III	
SAM IS WORRIED	23
CHAPTER IV	
THE DECISION	29
CHAPTER V	
THE FIRST INDIAN	36
CHAPTER VI	
THE WARNING	43
CHAPTER VII	
GOOD NEWS AND BAD	51
CHAPTER VIII	
ON THE LONG TRAIL	59
CHAPTER IX	
ALONG THE PLATTE	67
CHAPTER X	
STRANGE SOUNDS	72
CHAPTER XI	
THE CROW'S THREAT	83

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER XII	
TRAVELING BY THE NORTH STAB	91
CHAPTER XIII	
SPOTTED WOLF	100
CHAPTER XIV	
A STRANGE COUNTRY	109
CHAPTER XV	
THE HUNTING CAMP	119
CHAPTER XVI	
THE ELK HUNT	129
CHAPTER XVII	
LOOKING FOR THE TRAIL	138
CHAPTER XVIII	
JOHN COLTER'S ADVENTURE	147
CHAPTER XIX	
THE DREADED BLACKFEET	156
CHAPTER XX	
AFTER THE LOST HUNTERS	166
CHAPTER XXI	
THE BUCKSKIN MESSAGE	176
CHAPTER XXII	
A ROBBED CACHE	187
CHAPTER XXIII	
TO FOET HALL AND PIERRE'S HOLE	198
CHAPTER XXIV	
THE BRUSH FOET	211

CONTENTS 7

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXV	
WILL THEY COME?	220

CHAPTER XXVI	
THE TRAPPERS	229

CHAPTER XXVII	
ALDERS AND BEONC	237

CHAPTER XXVIII	
THE TRAPPER'S PLAN	251

CHAPTER XXIX	
AFTER THEM AGAIN	266

CHAPTER XXX	
A CLOSE CALL	273

CHAPTER XXXI	
A HORSE AND A DOG	282

CHAPTER XXXII	
TRAVEL, TRAVEL!	294

CHAPTER XXXIII	
A BIG FIGHT	303

CHAPTER XXXIV	
THE END OF THE TRAIL	316

ILLUSTRATIONS

“Oregon Trail! Oregon Trail! We’ve found the Trail!” (Page 146)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
“Good black soup,” he remarked. “Heap good” .	42
“Rub you out,” the Indian signaled once more . .	90
They were suddenly surrounded by Indians . . .	164
“I reckon they’re the Indians we’ve been hunting”	272
Al had an arrow sticking in his shoulder	314

THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

CHAPTER I

TWO BOYS AND A DOG

BEN HOWARD and Dick Hamilton were having such a good time in the woods near Fort Leavenworth, in Kansas, that they did not care how much longer they would have to wait for Mark Stebbins, who was to be their guide and leader, when they joined the emigrants who, in the spring of 1843, started from Missouri, to the far-away valley of the Willamette in Oregon.

The two lads were at the age, when boys have outgrown their childish fears, and when the love of discovery and adventure leads them into scrapes and difficulties which puzzle and worry their elders.

Their two older brothers, between eighteen and twenty, Sam Howard and Al Hamilton, had passed beyond the years when a boy just lives from day to day. They were suffering

12 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

much worry and anxiety; although all around them the birds sang in the trees, the squirrels chattered and raced, and every day their two small brothers related with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes their exploits and adventures with their big dog Prince.

For almost a month they had now camped and waited in the cabin of Mark Stebbins, who, according to an agreement made with the parents of the four lads, was to take the boys over the Oregon Trail to the Willamette Valley. The fathers and mothers of the lads with some smaller children, had left for Oregon by ship around Cape Horn, while the four lads with Stebbins and another man, familiarly known as Big Joe, were to take the long overland trail and do their best to bring some wagons, horses, and cattle to the American settlements in Oregon.

The Oregon country at this time was held jointly by the United States and Great Britain, and far-seeing American patriots, like the noble pioneer and missionary Marcus Whitman, were doing their best to attract American settlers to Oregon in order to save the disputed country for the United States.

It had seemed a wise and safe plan to spare the women and small children the hardships of a long and dangerous overland journey, while the four lads, under the leadership of Mark Stebbins and Big Joe, would join the overland train, which would leave Independence, Missouri, the latter part of May.

But now this well-devised plan was going all wrong. Mark Stebbins had been called back to Pittsburgh by the serious illness of his aged father. The emigrants, about one thousand strong, had started west on the twenty-second of May under the leadership of Peter H. Burnette, while Jesse Applegate was in command of the so-called cow column, which embraced about five thousand head of stock. With the emigrants was Marcus Whitman, who had come east the previous year to arouse interest in the Oregon country, and had now started west again for his station among the Cayuse Indians near Walla Walla. It would have been quite safe for the boys to travel through the Indian country in company of hundreds of armed men under the leadership and guidance of Burnette, Applegate, and Whitman.

14 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

For several weeks, the boys had kept up their spirits, looking every day for the return of Mark Stebbins and feeling sure that they could overtake the emigrant train, before it reached the dangerous Indian country.

But now that hope was gone. The long anxious days of waiting had dragged into weeks. It was the middle of June. The emigrant train must have reached the country of the thieving Pawnees and Crows and of the warlike Sioux on the middle and upper Platte River; but of Mark Stebbins there was no news.

About a week later the four lads were seated in the cabin for dinner. Dick and Ben had just come in, hungry and excited. Prince had learned a new trick, they related with much spirit. He could trail Indians. Sure, he could; and find them, too, every time. It didn't matter how the Indian was hid and how he doubled on his track.

"Dead sure, fellows," Dick finished the story. "Prince is a regular bloodhound. There can't any Indian give him the slip. And if the Indian climbs a tree, you ought to

hear Prince bark and see him scratch the tree just like a coon dog."

"What Indian did you try him on?" asked Al.

"We didn't have any real Indian to try him on," admitted Ben, "but we took turns playing Indian and white man, and he ran his Indian down every time."

"Better teach him to keep Indians away," suggested Dick's big brother Al.

"Oh, he knows that already," Dick came to the defense of their dog. "Don't you remember how he almost tore the blanket off the Indian that came to the cabin last month to ask for something to eat? I bet that Indian told all the other Indians, for there hasn't been one of them here since."

"You had better go and find Joe," Al changed the subject. "I am afraid the Indians will steal our cattle if Joe does not go to look for them, but Joe is awfully busy telling his big stories to some of the green soldiers at the fort. Hang it, boys, his stories don't fit together. I don't believe he has ever been a hundred miles west of the settlements. He surely does not seem to be very keen

16 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

about starting west without Mark Stebbins."

Just then a steamboat whistled for the landing on the Missouri, and with one thought in mind, the boys rushed out of the cabin and down the road to the landing.

If only Mark Stebbins was on the boat, all their troubles would be ended. Their brave and clear-headed friend would know just what to do.

CHAPTER II

A BIG PROBLEM

BEFORE the boat had dropped her gang-plank on the landing, Ben and Dick had climbed aboard, while Prince, their inseparable companion, although always a dignified dog, whined disconsolately because he could not climb a post and jump on board after the manner of his boy masters.

The two older lads quickly scanned every face of the mixed crowd that was impatient to land.

There were some officers and men in the uniform of the United States Army, for Fort Leavenworth was the great point of inspection for the Indian trade. Indians, traders, immigrants, and men not easily classified filed off behind the soldiers, but Mark Stebbins was not on board.

Sad and much disappointed the four lads walked slowly to the post-office. Perhaps Stebbins had sent a letter that would ex-

18 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

plain his failure to join them. He had always been a reliable friend, and something serious must have happened to prevent him from keeping an appointment of such importance to his young friends and to fail in keeping his promise made to the parents of the lads, who had placed such utmost confidence in him. For it had only been on the condition that Stebbins would bring the four lads safely to Oregon that their mothers had consented to let the boys make the long, dangerous overland journey of two thousand miles.

The postmaster did find a letter for Sam Howard addressed in the clear, strong hand of Stebbins.

"MY DEAR BOYS," Sam read aloud, with his three friends crowding around him in a corner of the post-office.

"You cannot be more disappointed than I am at my inability of going with you to Oregon. But my aged father died a few days ago and it is my mother's wish that I stay with her during the summer.

"This wish I must respect and heartily desire to respect.

"As it is, you must either go without me, or wait till next spring, when I should be glad to take you through.

"I could, this season, not meet you till September, and that would be entirely too late to start, for the trip takes about four months; and travel over the plains and through the mountains in the dead of winter would be too dangerous for us, and we should not be able to find food for our horses.

"So you must either now join the emigrants without me, or wait for me till next spring.

"I have written your father two letters, telling him that I am unable to fulfill my contract and what I have suggested to you. One letter I have sent via New Orleans by boat, and another overland by way of Independence in care of Marcus Whitman, the missionary.

"Hoping that we may safely meet either in Oregon or at Fort Leavenworth, I am,

"Ever your friend,

"MARK STEBBINS."

Sam folded the letter, and silently left the post-office, the other lads following him. All four of them had looked forward to the great journey across the continent with Mark Stebbins for almost a year. The two younger lads especially had, in their imagination, traveled the route a thousand times. They had fought and outwitted Indians in all sorts of ways, and several times one or the other had started from his sleep with a yell, dreaming that a savage warrior had at last caught him and

was going to lift his scalp. They had, in fancy, hunted bear and buffalo and antelope, they had practised shooting with bows and arrows, and had tried Sam's and Al's rifles whenever they could persuade their big brothers to let them do so. And now it looked as if all this planning would come to nothing. A whole year Mark Stebbins had said they would have to wait for him. Did Mark Stebbins realize what it meant to wait for something a whole year?

In a glum mood the four lads slowly walked up the hill toward their cabin.

"Sam," Ben at last broke the silence, "you aren't going to stick around here a whole year? Are you? Why, man, by that time Father and Mother will be back, and we shall not get to go at all. Why can't you take us to Oregon? You have been in the Indian country. We can join the emigrants and get through all right and Mark Stebbins can come next year, if he wants to."

"Sure, Sam," Dick added, "you can be our captain and take us through. And Big Joe will go. Five of us can get through, even if we don't catch up with the emigrants."

Again they walked on in silence, while Sam seemed to be thinking over the suggestions of the younger lads.

It was true he had been in the Indian country with a trader one summer. He had acquired a fair knowledge of the Indian sign language, and knew something of Indian ways and life on the plains, but he had never thought of being responsible for the safety of the party. He felt that if he were to travel all alone, he might be willing to take the chance.

"I do not think we can catch up with the emigrants," he replied after some time. "Of course, they cannot travel very fast, but they have been on the trail nearly a month, and must have made about five hundred miles. They are now, I figure, somewhere on the upper Platte, some five hundred miles from here."

"I do not think they have gone that far," Al took up the thought. "They travel in wagons, and have to drive about five thousand head of loose stock; and you know cattle won't travel unless you drive them."

"We can catch up with them, Sam," Ben

22 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

broke in. "Let us leave the wagons and the cows here, all go on horseback and load our stuff on pack horses as the traders and trappers do. Then we can start early every morning and travel till dark every day. If we do that, we can catch up with them by the time they get to that fort on the Snake River; what's the name of it?"

"Fort Hall," Sam answered.

"Yes, Fort Hall. Maybe some of them will rest there for a while, for the women will be all tired out. But you see we could travel right along every day."

"Are you sure, Sam, you could find the trail?" asked the younger and more timid Dick.

"Of course, he could," Ben spoke up without waiting for Sam to reply. "You think we couldn't find the trail of a hundred wagons? Prince can do it, if we can't."

"He couldn't either," Dick protested. "A dog can't smell wagon tracks."

"Oh, come off, Dick," Ben blurted out. "He can see them, can't he? Dick, you'll never be a great Indian fighter, you are always afraid of something."

CHAPTER III

SAM IS WORRIED

THE two young lads finished their dinner, when they reached the cabin, but Sam said he was not hungry any more. He would take his gun and go to the woods with Prince to get a wild turkey for Sunday, for this was Saturday and the camp was out of fresh meat.

Ben and Dick wanted to go along, but this time the kind-hearted Sam was firm in his refusal.

“No, you can’t go,” he told them flatly. “You haven’t done a thing for a week but chase around in the woods with the dog. You go and find Joe and then ride out on the prairie with him to bring the cattle into the corral. We have not seen them for three days. The first thing we know, some Indian will steal them and sell them for a jug of whiskey. Then you bring the cows in and

milk them, and at dark you have some supper ready, for Al is going with me turkey-hunting."

"Are we going to Oregon?" Ben asked, as if Sam's injunction about cattle and supper and milking had made no impression on him.

"You youngsters go and do what I told you," Sam answered rather severely. "And if you don't dry up about Oregon, I'll drop you in the cow pond. And mind you have the two cows milked when Al and I come home. If you don't, you'll get switched. You two kids are the laziest pair in Kansas. When Al and I were your age we had to milk five cows mornings and evenings. Now get out of here and find Joe. He's one of a kind with you. I don't see why Father and Stebins loaded us up with him. He's no earthly good. Never here to do anything, and only in the way, when he is here."

"Gosh!" piped up Ben, as he and Dick trudged down the road to Jack Le Mure's trading post. "Sam has got an awful grouch on. I bet his girl has gone back on him."

"Say, Dick, are you going to get a girl, when you get as big as Sam? I ain't. Girls

are just a lot of bother, and every little while they get mad at a fellow.’’

Ben and Dick found Big Joe at Le Mure’s in the coils of one of his long stories. When after a few minutes Joe’s yarn showed no sign of coming to an end, Ben made bold to break in.

“Joe,” he said, “you had better come and look for the stock. Sam and Al are pretty mad at us. Sam got a letter from Mark Stebbins, saying he isn’t going with us to Oregon. You are to get the cattle home and Dick and I are to milk the cows. Really, Sam is mad. He said we were three of a kind. You had better come right away. Maybe, we’ll all start for Oregon Monday or Tuesday without Mark Stebbins.”

Sam and Al in the meantime had each taken a gun and sauntered slowly through the hilly woods just west of Fort Leavenworth. Wild turkeys were no longer common near the fort, but a good hunter might still find a few within two or three miles.

“If that wonderful dog of the kids’ was any kind of a bird-dog, we would be pretty sure of our dinner, but bird-tracks are too

26 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

fine for his nose. When it comes to men or animals, he is right there," remarked Sam.

"He is surely no bird-dog," admitted Al. "I think he is really a fighting dog. I didn't tell you, but last week one day, he nearly killed Le Mure's big Indian dog, Kaw. For a few minutes Prince let the cur sort of make faces at him; then quick as a flash, he had him by the throat so the cur couldn't even yelp. If I had not pulled him off by main force, he would have killed that cur on the spot. I thought at first he had broken the brute's neck the way he shook him around. You should have seen Kaw streak it for home, as soon as he came to!

"Major O'Toole saw the fight and offered me ten dollars for him; but I told the Major he was not for sale, because he belonged to our small brothers."

"Lucky for you," Sam laughed. "You would have had to buy him back, if you had sold him.

"I guess I was a little rough with the youngsters, they are a pretty fine pair, all right."

Late in the afternoon the hunters flushed

a turkey, and Prince, after the bird had alighted in a hickory, held his attention until the hunters had time to crawl up within range. That was all Prince seemed to be able to learn about hunting game-birds; but the trail of a deer he had been known to follow all day.

When the hunters had secured their turkey, they sat down on a log to rest.

"I don't know what to do, Al," Sam began. "It is too late in the season to take any wagon and stock across the mountains. Then, again, I do not relish the idea of crossing the Indian country with so small a party, even if we could count on Joe. He is big in bulk and talk, but that's all.

"I know," he continued after a while, "none of the tribes except the Blackfeet are really hostile to the whites, but you cannot trust any of them. Some irresponsible war party or horse-stealing party of reckless young bucks is likely to be tempted to rob and murder a small party of travelers or trappers whenever they think it is safe to do so.

"If we do go, we ought to sell the cows and

28 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

other stock and buy guns. If Indians find you prepared to fight, they are generally willing to smoke and be friendly. I learned that much about Indian ways and Indian character."

CHAPTER IV

THE DECISION

WHEN the hunters arrived in camp, their small brothers, for once, had obeyed orders. The cows were milked, the horses were in the corral, and supper was on the table.

An hour later Joe returned with all the mixed stock, except one big steer, but as that belonged to Joe himself, very little was said about the matter. However Sam and Al agreed that hereafter all the cattle must be brought to the corral every evening.

Young men, who have roamed the woods in search of game generally sleep soundly, but Sam tossed restlessly on his bed of corn-husks for the greater part of the night. And when he did fall asleep, his worried and excited mind saw a great plain covered with the tepees of Sioux, Cheyennes, and Shoshones, and while he was trying to pass them unobserved, bands of Pawnees and Blackfeet

30 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

raised the warwhoop in his rear and came galloping at him with lifted tomahawks and hideous blackened faces.

When he sprang out of bed startled and confused, the June sun was shining through the windows, and the cattle were bellowing in the corral.

Although the sun stood three hours high, his four companions were still soundly asleep.

"Wake up, wake up, you bats," Sam called to them. "Some day a cyclone will blow you fellows back into Illinois and I believe you wouldn't wake up till you landed."

When cattle and horses had been released and the five companions had sat down to their breakfast of bacon and corn bread, Sam's mind was made up.

"Boys," he said quietly, "I have thought it over all night. We can't hang around here and just kill time for a whole year. None of us could stand that. The chance of Mark's letters ever reaching Oregon is pretty slim, you know, and our fathers and mothers would think we had all been killed and scalped. If you feel as I do, we start for Oregon as soon as we can get ready."

“Hurrah!” cried Al, “that’s good talk,” while Ben and Dick jumped up and began to kiss and hug Sam.

“Look out, look out, you imps.” Sam tried to quiet them, after they had broken a cup and almost spilled the bacon on the floor. “You had better go and kiss Martha good-by.”

“Ah, you’ve got to do that,” Ben blurted out. “She’s your girl; we know it all right. She asked us yesterday if you were coming to the dance last night and we told her no, you had too big a grouch on.”

“Ben, you fresh kid, into the pond you go!” retorted Sam, “you have had it coming for a long time.” But when he had carried the screaming and sprawling boy half-way to his wet destination, he let him slip away, saying that the Indians would cure him of his freshness.

Big Joe also was ready to go to Oregon, although he did not display any joy at the prospect.

From that moment no time was wasted at the Fort Leavenworth cabin. Wagons and cattle belonging to the Howard and Hamilton

32 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

families Sam and Al sold or traded for horses, arms, and provisions; while the horses and cattle belonging to Mark Stebbins were turned over to Jack Le Mure until their owner would claim them.

Within less than a week after the receipt of the letter of Mark Stebbins the lads were ready to start. Each of them rode a good saddle-horse, their things, provisions, and a few Indian goods were loaded on six pack-horses, while they took three extra horses for emergencies, and the dog Prince was one of the party that left Fort Leavenworth at daybreak the latter part of June.

Emigrants to Oregon took for their principal provisions about one hundred pounds of flour and sixty pounds of bacon to a man, but Sam Howard and his party felt compelled to travel light and expected to add largely to their provisions by hunting as soon as they struck the buffalo country on the Platte, so they took less than half of these rations to a man. In addition to the two staples they added to their packs some dried fruit, tea, coffee, sugar, salt, and beans, together with a quantity of tobacco and an assortment of

goods for trading with the Indians and for making presents to those whose friendship they might wish to secure.

In the matter of arms and ammunitions, Sam had followed the advice of the best free trappers and traders, who made themselves respected and even formidable by being liberally supplied with the best of firearms and by their skill and boldness in using them in defense of their lives and property.

Each one was supplied with a good rifle, two pistols, and a sheath-knife. Two double-barreled shotguns for the party, were also added to their armament. These they expected to use for securing small game, in case they should fail to find enough big game. And if they should ever have to fight at close quarters these guns loaded with ball and buck-shot would beat off any small party of hostile Indians.

Thus equipped they cast a last farewell glance over the wooded hills and the great river that rolled its gray, muddy waters over shallows and sand-bars, past long stretches of bushy willows and airy groves of tall cottonwoods.

34 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

Their road led northwesterly to join the trail from St. Joseph which in turn joined the Oregon Trail about eight miles beyond the crossing of the Big Blue River, a tributary of the Kansas River.

On the second evening out they camped on a small prairie creek, which offered good grass and water for their horses and where small clumps of timber furnished them plenty of fuel.

Although all felt a little stiff and tired from being ten hours in the saddle, they were in high spirits. The trail had been fine. The prairie lay spread out like an endless carpet of fresh soft green, dotted with many kinds of midsummer flowers. White, fluffy clouds had now and then softened the glare of the sun and had added the charm of variety to the deep blue sky that rose from a landscape of rolling, flowery prairie and winding wooded streams.

The travelers estimated that they had covered between fifty and sixty miles since leaving Fort Leavenworth.

It was still early in the afternoon, when they made camp, and to Ben fell by lot the

first turn of herding the horses till supper-time.

“This is our first plains’ camp,” Sam instructed him. “You take your rifle and pistols. Keep your own horse saddled and be ready to mount him any moment. When we signal you to come to supper, you bring the horses in and we picket them close to camp for the night. And mark you all, boys: the one that loses a horse will walk the trail for a week, no matter how many blisters he may raise on his feet. Remember, if our horses are lost, we are lost.”

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST INDIAN

ALTHOUGH Dick had not been detailed for horse duty, he went with Ben to look after the animals, because Sam had told him that he was not wanted in camp and that he might as well learn to look after the horses.

“Don’t let any of them straggle off into the brush, but keep them all in sight, and don’t let them spread out too far”; these were Sam’s final instructions.

The boys were glad to be out of the saddle. They stretched themselves on the grass and watched the horses slowly graze down stream.

It was the time of day when birds and animals become active, and wooded streams on the prairie are everywhere favorite places for birds and animals.

The young of most birds had already left the nest, and the season, when woods and prairie rang with the songs of many kinds of birds, was already past. But a quail was

calling his "Bob White" from some concealed perch; while a noisy, big fly-catcher rolled out his wild notes from the broad top of a big elm near the stream.

On the sloping prairie the gophers were busy running to and fro as if all their work had to be done in a great hurry, for a gopher in the open lives in constant fear of hawks and is fairly safe from his enemies only in his underground tunnels.

On a knoll, within easy rifle range Ben discovered a badger.

"Look at that, look at that!" he called to Dick. "See him throw the dirt out." Prince, who of course had gone with the boys, had taken no interest in birds and gophers, but now he whined excitedly and looked at the boys as if asking for the word to go after the badger.

"No, you can't go. Lie down, Prince!" Ben ordered. "Sam says you'll be just a useless cur and a nuisance, if you start to fighting and running every creature you see."

"Say, Dick," Ben began after a minute, "I'd like to give that badger one with my rifle. He is good eating, isn't he?"

38 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

"Don't you do it, Ben," Dick warned his impulsive friend. "Don't you remember that Sam told us all only yesterday never to fire a gun while on horse duty, except as a danger signal?"

The horses had, by this time gone farther down stream, and the boys followed them over a rise in the prairie.

From the ridge the boys could see the winding course of the small stream for several miles; and Dick now discovered something which made Ben forget about the badger, who was still at work on his knoll.

A wreath of smoke arose over the tree-tops about half a mile down the stream. The boys at once headed the horses toward camp, and then scouted down stream on foot. They went far enough to make sure that the smoke came from an Indian camp of one tepee.

Soon after they returned to the horses, the supper signal went up at camp and the two herders were not slow in coming to camp.

The news about the Indian camp seemed to interest Sam and Al less than the two younger boys had expected.

"Probably some Oto, Missouri, or Shaw-

nee," remarked Sam, "who is taking life easy in a summer camp away from the large, noisy camps of his friends. But it shows that you never know where you will run into Indians. It would not surprise me if we should have some visitors a little later."

Ben and Dick hoped that they would, and they were not disappointed in their wish; for about an hour later, a tall, manly-looking Indian was coming up creek straight for camp.

Prince became uneasy and growled as soon as he became aware of the Indian's approach. To him as to some white men, all live Indians were bad Indians.

"Howdy! Howdy!" the Indian, a man of about sixty, greeted the campers. "Howdy, Young Soldier," he added as he shook hands with Sam and looked him square in the face.

"How are you, Moquah?" Sam replied heartily, now recognizing the Shawnee chief, who generally made his summer camp on Turkey Creek, and who had become Sam's friend a year ago, when Sam went with a trader up the Platte River.

Moquah knew quite a number of words of

English, but he was also a good sign-talker; and Sam had been compelled to pick up quite a bit of sign talk as he had sold goods and bought fur and buffalo robes among several tribes whose language he had no time to learn.

Very soon the two friends were having a big talk, with the other members of the camp looking on and listening.

“Good horses!” said the chief, looking at the animals and adding in signs, “Good buffalo hunters, good war horses, run fast.”

After a moment of silence the chief made a sign with both hands, one passing the other in front of him.

“No,” replied Sam, “no trade. Go to Oregon!”

Then the chief pointed up and down and in various directions with the index finger of his right hand.

“He wants to know where it is,” Sam told his friends, and in reply he moved his right hand in a curve away from him and said, “Shining Mountains.”

By this gesture and the two English words

Moquah understood that Oregon was a place beyond the Rocky Mountains.

Then the chief held up the five fingers of his right hand, cast a glance around at all the five members of the company, and asked: "More men?"

By this time Dick and Ben were getting much interested, for they had often wondered how one could talk and trade with Indians by signs. They had caught the chief's meaning. He asked whether they had more than five men.

"No," replied Sam. "All here."

The chief's face became very serious.

"Bad!" He spoke earnestly. "Very bad. Get killed. All killed." And then he rapidly made the signs for Pawnees, Arapahoes, Sioux, Crows, Cheyennes, Shoshones, and Blackfeet.

"What does he say?" asked Al.

"He tells us," Sam explained, "of all the Indian tribes we may meet on our way."

Now the chief raised his thumb and index finger to the side of his head, and made the sign for thief and horses.

"He says," Sam interpreted: "Pawnees big thieves, steal your horses."

And as Moquah continued his talk in signs, Sam kept on translating it:

"Crows big thieves, steal horses, guns, blankets. Steal everything.

"Shoshones good Indians. Far away, in Shining Mountains.

"Blackfeet"—and here the chief showed strong disgust—"bad Indians. All bad. Kill white men. Go to war all the time, winter and summer. Steal everything you have. Scalp you. Hold big dance round scalp-pole."

After expressing his opinion of the Blackfeet, the chief seemed to rest a minute. Then he made a sign of chopping or cutting off with the extended palm of his right hand with which he quickly made a downward motion several times, just touching the extended palm of his left hand.

"He says they will cut our heads off," Ben blurted out.

"Ben, keep still," Sam rebuked the forward lad. "He means his speech is cut off; he has finished his talk."

When Al and Dick laughed at Ben's mistake, Moquah at first looked offended, but as soon as Sam had explained that they were laughing at Ben's poor guess at sign talk, he heartily joined in the laugh.

Indians have a keen sense of humor, and are not at all a sad and morose people. When no lost warriors are mourned, and there is no sickness or hunger in camp, they indulge in all kinds of fun.

There was not much talking after this. The boys treated their visitor to a meal of bacon, coffee and sugar, and white bread, on which he made a big feast. In those days any articles of white man's food were a great luxury to an Indian.

Moquah was especially pleased with the big kettleful of sweet coffee, which he praised in words, which sorely taxed Ben's and Ted's determination not to laugh.

"Good black soup!" he remarked. "Heap good, big heap good!"

When he arose to go, Sam made him a present of some tobacco, and also gave him a cupful of powder for which he had expressed a desire. To his wife and three daughters,

44 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

Sam sent a small bag of beads and some needles.

When he had left, Sam impressed it upon the boys that they must never laugh at anything an Indian does and says. "If you do, he will never talk freely to you again and will never be your friend."

"Why couldn't we induce Moquah to go with us as far as Fort Hall?" Al suggested.

"Moquah would be a great help to us," Sam admitted, "but I feel sure that we could not induce him to go.

"An Indian is very much attached to his family, and feels the duty of providing for them. The chief would not leave his family and go with us to Fort Hall; and if he did, it would be more dangerous for him to return alone, than for us to go without him."

"But he knows Indian ways better than we do," Big Joe argued.

"That is true enough," agreed Sam. "But he could not fight any harder than either of us, and he is not nearly so well armed. I am not going to ask Moquah or any other Indian to go with us. If any of you are afraid now to go with me, you can still return

to Fort Leavenworth. I told you there just what the Shawnee told you to-night. Now, if any of you feel scared, we'll just go as far as the Platte to hunt buffalo and go back home."

"I am not afraid," protested Joe. "I am going, if the rest of you are. Can't scare me with any Blackfeet."

After a while Sam said it was time to roll in.

"I do not think we need to stand guard to-night," he added. "That fool dog will wake us up if anything goes wrong."

"Sam, he isn't a fool if he can stand guard," Ben objected. "He couldn't know that Moquah was your friend."

"Well, I hope," Sam replied laughing, "he will not get us into trouble by starting to chew up friendly Indians. Everybody go to sleep now. We have to reel off another thirty miles to-morrow. Remember it is two thousand miles to Fort Vancouver in Oregon."

CHAPTER VI

THE WARNING

PRINCE acquitted himself well of his duty as camp guard. He was naturally not a noisy, barking cur, but a big, long-legged dog, whose head and muzzle suggested a bulldog, but his long legs and powerful, large body seemed to make him a relative of bloodhounds and big Danes. He did not bark freely at strangers, but the loudness of his growl and a few explosive whoofs were a sure index to the degree of his dislike for strange humans, dogs or other creatures.

If a hungry coyote prowled too close to camp he rushed at the intruder with a short contemptuous snarl. Only once one of these wary, wild dogs had tried a contest with the big brindled Dane. With a quickness one would not credit to a dog so large and heavy, Prince had secured a death grip on the coyote's neck, shook him as if he were

a cat or woodchuck, and dropped him dead.

The big gray wolves he did not attack, but announced their presence by a few barks and short dashes toward them. Both Sam and his former owner, a retired Mountain trapper, had always discouraged him from a contest with a wolf. They were too much attached to him and he was too valuable a dog to have him maimed or killed by a savage wolf.

As to other dogs, he treated them all with a haughty contempt. If one was bent on starting a fight, there was likely to be a dead dog, unless his master interfered. His former owner assured Sam that Prince had killed nine dogs in so many fair fights.

During the night on Turkey Creek, Prince made several rushes at impertinent coyotes, but nothing more serious disturbed the peace of the camp.

Before the party resumed their journey in the morning, Moquah came again to camp, looking quite troubled.

"You must not go," he said to Sam, after he had smoked for a time in silence, while the other four men were putting packs and

saddles on the horses, "you have only three men. The Blackfeet are many, many; like snowflakes in winter. They will rub you out." The last sentence he expressed in sign by rubbing the palm of his right hand over the back of the left hand.

Steve saw that the chief was seriously alarmed at the dangers his party would have to face.

"I am grateful," he replied, "that Moquah comes to speak to his white son. But we are not foolish boys, we have good guns. See, my father," and he drew one of Colt's six-shooters from his holster, "this is our big medicine. We all have two like that. Even my small brothers have them, and will learn to use them before we meet Pawnees or Crows or Blackfeet."

"Good medicine, a gun that shoots six times," the old man replied. "White men are brave, but you are not enough. The Pawnees are many, the Crows are many, the Blackfeet are many. They are in the mountains, they are on the plains. They rise from the grass like the birds, they creep through the dark night like the coyotes. Your eye

says that they are not there, but their arrow will find you. They are fierce like the gray wolves, they will rub you out. I am done."

The chief had spoken in the impressive manner of combining his broken English with simple, impressive signs.

Sam felt he must tell his friend why they could not turn back.

"Your tongue is not double, my father," he began "you speak the truth, but we must go. Our fathers and mothers and little brothers have already gone in a big canoe over the big water. They will mourn us as dead, if we wait till the snow has melted again. We must go now."

Sam was not sure that Moquah understood what he meant by "big water" and "big canoe," for Moquah was silent and seemed to be inwardly struggling with some resolution.

"My son," he said after a few minutes, handing his pipe to Sam, "smoke with me. You must go beyond the Shining Mountains to the camp of your father. I do not know why white men travel so far. Perhaps they love not the country where they were boys as all the Indians do. I shall give you my

50 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

medicine. It is good medicine. No white man has seen it. I do not need it. The Shawnees no longer make war."

Then he opened his hunting-bag and unfolded a piece of deerskin, from which he took a tooth, an ear, and a foot of a big wolf.

"Take these," he said. "They will make your heart strong, your feet swift, and your ears sharp. I have carried them many winters. They have helped me to take scalps from the brave Comanches and the thieving Pawnees. You do not laugh at the Indians, so I give you my strong medicine."

Then he shook hands with Sam and slowly walked down the creek to his own camp.

"Sam, you do not believe in any Indian medicine?" asked Al, when the boys had been told the gist of his talk with Moquah.

"No, I do not believe in it," Sam admitted, "but I shall carry the medicine with me as I promised and not show it to any one, till we get to Oregon."

"Can't we see it either?" asked Ben.

"Not till we reach Oregon. Now get on your horses, and let us travel. The sun is already an hour high."

CHAPTER VII

GOOD NEWS AND BAD

THE small caravan moved quietly along, for each of the three men was busy turning over in his own mind, the warning of the old Shawnee. Sam, especially, was much troubled, because he felt that he had made himself responsible for the lives of his two cousins and his younger brother.

Was the danger as great as Moquah saw it? Were not all the plains tribes, except the Blackfeet, much more troublesome to one another than they were to white men? The Blackfeet, he knew had always been avowed enemies of the whites. But he did not need to take his party through the Blackfeet country. The trail ran far to the south of this hostile tribe. Of course, he knew that all of the plains Indians, being well provided with horses, often sent horse-stealing parties and war parties as far as two hundred miles from their camps. If he had only two or three

more men, so they could stand guard at night without wearing themselves out with loss of sleep, he would not be afraid of traveling from the Missouri to Oregon and back again; because he knew that there was not a war party from Mexico to Canada that was armed half so well as his party.

But then again it flashed across his mind: What could three men and two boys do against a howling mob of a hundred savages, all mad with the lust for plunder and the savage desire for fame as warriors? He almost wished now that Mark Stebbins had told him right out not to make the trip without him.

The more he thought about it, the more he felt that he had made a mess of it.

If they went back, the whole Fort would laugh at them. If they went ahead and some of them got killed, he would always feel that his was the blame.

Ben and Dick noticed that Sam was not in his usual cheerful mood.

"I bet," Ben whispered, "he's got Martha on his mind. I shouldn't wonder if some day he'll want to go clear back to Fort

Leavenworth to get her. Well, any girl ought to be mighty glad to go with Sam to Oregon."

"Oh, nonsense," Dick argued. "He doesn't have to go back to Fort Leavenworth. There'll be lots of girls in Oregon."

"Dick, you are just a fool kid. You don't know anything," Ben flashed at him. "Do you suppose any girl in Oregon is good enough for Sam? Not by a long sight, I say."

"I think I'll just ask him what's the matter."

"You had better not," Dick cautioned. "He's got lots to think of besides Martha. Maybe he is thinking about the Indians Moquah said we'd have trouble with."

"No," objected Ben, "Sam is not afraid of Indians. He knows all about them and can talk to them with his fingers. I'm not afraid to go with Sam, but I wouldn't go with Joe, although he is big and strong."

About noon they passed a camp of Otos, who wanted them to stop and trade, but when Sam made them understand that he was in a hurry to reach the buffalo country they did not molest them.

When they were out of sight of the camp of the Otos, they stopped for about an hour to water and rest their horses, and eat a light lunch.

In the evening they again camped early. After all had enjoyed a swim in a deep hole in the creek they divided the work for the evening. Al and Joe arranged the packs and made supper, the two small boys looked after the horses, and Sam scouted up and down the creek for a way in quest of deer or turkeys, and on the lookout for Indians; although he did not expect any hostile Reds before striking the Platte.

Two turkeys were the result of Sam's hunt.

"There," he remarked as he dropped the birds near the fire, "you fellows destroy bacon like so many wolves. If we don't start right in to get some game, we shall have to eat our horses when we reach the mountains."

As Sam had not found any signs of Indians, the boys again turned guarding the camp over to Prince. Ben threw a piece of canvas on the ground near the horses and said: "Watch them, Prince!"

Once during the night Sam, who was the lightest sleeper, heard the dog growl angrily, but he thought that one of the coyotes that had been yapping and howling near camp had come too close to suit Prince, so hearing the horses move about quietly, where they had been picketed, he turned around and went to sleep again.

In the morning, however, the boys learned that Prince had not growled at a sneaking coyote, but at a man, at one of their own number. Big Joe was gone, and a slab of bacon, a small bag of flour, and a frying-pan were also missing.

Now Sam knew why Prince had been growling. Joe had, of course, intended to take at least one of the horses. But to this Prince had objected, and rather than alarm the camp, Joe had deserted on foot.

“Well,” commented Al, “I am glad he is gone, boys. He didn’t fit in and would have been no help in case we should run into any tight places. I think he is a good riddance.”

“Hang his big yellow hide,” muttered Sam. “Now we have to go it alone or turn back and wait for Mark Stebbins.”

“If you will lead us, we will stand by you,” all three of the boys replied at once. “We don’t want to turn back and wait a whole year.”

Sam was willing to take the risk as far as he himself was concerned, but he said before he made up his mind for good he wanted to learn the news about the emigrants and the behavior of the Indians when they struck the real Oregon Trail near the crossing of the Big Blue River in the present state of Nebraska.

When they reached this point, a few days later, they made camp near the shack of old Josiah Smith, a retired mountaineer, who lived at this place during the summer and spent the winter at Independence or Westport.

Smith told them that the emigrants had crossed the Kansas River about June first and had passed his place a few days later. They had divided into two parties, because the crowd was too large to travel in one party. He thought they must have reached the mountains by this time.

The Indians, he said, had not been trouble-

some. The emigrants had not been attacked; they might have had some cattle stolen, that was all.

“So you boys are going it alone, all the way to Oregon,” he remarked, when told of the plan of the party. “It’s pretty risky for a small bunch like your’n. But if you’re lucky and wise, you may make it.

“Now, let me tell you,” he continued, after looking at the horses and the guns of the party. “Don’t let a bunch of them crowd into your camp. Don’t let more than one or two come near you. That’s one golden rule in the Indian country.

“The next one is: Don’t start a fight with them. Let ’em talk and threaten, but keep cool. Let ’em call you dogs or cowards. That’s Indian brag. They won’t fight, unless they have a great advantage of you. If they know that some of them will surely be killed, they will not start anything. But if you have killed or wounded one of them, they become like wolves that have smelled blood. And, unless you get out of the country mighty quick, they will dog your trail day and night till they get you.

58 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

“Keep a sharp lookout. If you spy any big camps, steer shy of them. Travel after dark, leave the trail. Don't camp with them. Your horses and your packs would look awfully tempting to them. Give 'em a wide berth, I say, lads.”

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE LONG TRAIL

AFTER a good night's sleep, Sam had made up his mind.

"If you are willing to take chances with me, I shall try my level best to take you through. It's a long trail, and God only knows what dangers and hardships we may meet. It will have to be one for all, and all for one," the young man announced his decision. "What do you say, boys? Do we go ahead or do we go back?"

"Go ahead!" all three cried with one voice.

"Sam," Al added, as he shook the shoulders of his friend, "you know we would go with you to China or any place on earth."

When the two smaller boys began to shout and dance like wild Indians, then even the dignified Prince gave way to the excitement by jumping with his forefeet on Ben's shoulders and barking in his face.

The lads were in high spirits, when shortly after sunrise they left their camp on the Big Blue.

In about two hours they came to the junction of the trail from St. Joseph, on which they had been traveling, with the well marked Oregon Trail, which the emigrants had taken from Independence. With lusty shouts they fell into the paths, which a hundred wagons and several thousand head of stock had cut into the wild prairie a month before.

On both sides of the trail, the grass had been cut to the roots by the hungry herds of cattle and horses. But the big train had passed a month ago; and several heavy showers had watered the prairie since that time, so that the grass had come out green and fresh. There would be no dearth of feed for their horses. All they had to see to was to give their animals time enough to graze and not travel so hard as to make them footsore. But as all the riders were light in weight, the packs small, and three horses free of any load, they expected no difficulties on account of their animals giving out.

Gradually the aspect of the country was

changing. The grass was of a different kind and was much shorter than it had been farther east. The creeks were few and small with little or no water, and the big walnuts, hickories, hackberries, and oaks had given place to a scrubby growth of willows, cottonwoods, and ash, but as yet there was no lack of shelter, fuel, or water, although the rainy season was evidently past.

Sam had agreed to act as the scout and hunter of the expedition, and while the other boys were preparing the noon lunch and watering the horses, they heard him fire a shot in a clump of small ash and wild plum-trees.

"What did you get?" the boys asked, when he returned to camp soon after.

"Guess!" Sam whetted their curiosity.

"It was not a turkey," replied Al, "for you would have brought him along. Maybe you missed."

"No, I got my game," Sam laughed.

"A deer or antelope," Dick suggested.

"No, better than that."

"A buffalo or an elk," Ben guessed.

"No, I know!" Dick cried, "a bear!"

62 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

"Better than that," Sam said again. "You couldn't guess it. I killed a fat yearling steer. To-night, boys, we'll have the finest beef roast you ever ate."

"A steer?" asked Al. "How does a fat steer happen to be on this creek?"

"That is easily explained," Sam answered. "An old cow thought that grove was good enough for herself and her calves and she didn't care to walk all the way to Oregon. The men missed her in the morning round-up, and she stayed here with her small calf and the yearling. The little fellow is as fat and sleek as a pig and as wild as a deer. I did not like to kill him, and I think the yearling will keep us in meat till we reach the buffaloes. The way you fellows begin to eat, a calf would last us about two days; and we must keep traveling and not waste any time hunting."

"But what will become of the cow and the calf? Won't the wolves eat them?" asked Dick.

"No, the old cow will beat off the wolves all right. You should have seen her go for me when I approached the calf. Some Indians

will get her, or more likely old Smith will come along and add her to his herd. You noticed he had quite a bunch of cattle. I fancy he just found a good many of them. Others he bought or traded from the emigrants. They were animals that had become lame and could not keep up with the train. In the fall they will all be fat and he will drive them to Independence and sell them for a good price.”

“Well, that’s a new game,” remarked Al.

“And a good game for Smith,” added Sam. “I know of one old fellow away out on the Santa Fé Trail, who buys all the lame mules and oxen that reach his ranch, and when they have recovered he sells them at a good profit to other trains in need of more animals. You see, you don’t have to go to the Pacific coast to find a good business.”

“Oh, but I wouldn’t stick around here and buy all kinds of lame critters. I want to go to Oregon,” Ben asserted.

In the afternoon they met a small party of Indians, and before any one could interfere, one of the Indian dogs had challenged Prince to a fight with the result that he was now

lying on his side and kicking his last kicks.

The leader of the party, an old man, was frankly displeased at this outcome.

"Bad dog," he muttered, pointing to Prince.

"He good dog," pointing to his own dead cur. "He pull travois. He find deer. You pay him."

Here was a sudden dilemma. "Ben, get a hold of that fool dog of yours," ordered Sam gruffly. "He'll get us into more trouble."

Ben jumped off, seized the growling and snarling Prince by the ears, while half a dozen Indian dogs of all colors yapped and yelped and danced around him.

"You pay him!" the old Indian repeated angrily.

"Hang the beast!" Sam remarked to Al. "I suppose that's what we shall have to do. A dead dog is not worth fighting or fussing about." So he opened a pack and gave the old man a plug of tobacco for himself and a yard of red calico for his squaw.

With this indemnity the old man was well pleased and at once changed his manner.

"You want more dog fight?" he asked

with a grin. "Fight him all. Same price."

"No sir," replied Sam curtly, not appreciating the situation. "Get along with your curs."

"Ben, take Prince away or I'll sell him to the Indians."

When the boys were on their way again, all laughed except Sam.

"Sam," Al began to joke, "that old Wrinkleface would have been mighty well pleased with one good bite of tobacco."

"Yes, you giggling kids! Why didn't one of you bite off a piece for him. You were all mighty glad to let me settle the trouble."

"Well, you are the boss. Aren't you?" Ben chirped in.

"All right, Ben, I guess I am," retorted Sam. "Now you look out for your blooming pup. The next Indian is likely to want one of our horses for a dead dog. If Prince does any more damage, you pay for it, or I sell him."

"If you sell Prince to the Indians," Ben replied angrily, "Dick and I shall go with the Indians."

"That would be fun, Little Crosspatch,"

66 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

Sam laughed. "Then Al and I would get to Oregon in two weeks, if we didn't have to bother with you kids and your dog."

"All right, he is my dog now. You said so yourself, so you can't sell him," was Ben's quick reply.

CHAPTER IX

ALONG THE PLATTE

PRINCE had no more chances to make trouble that day, except that he broke away to chase an antelope. But the game left him so far behind that very soon he returned rather crestfallen. He had learned that an antelope was not built to be caught by a dog.

In the evening the lads had a feast on fresh, fat beef, of which Al had roasted two large pieces on a green pole over a hot fire of buffalo chips, for wood was scarce at this camp.

There had been no meatless days in Sam's camp; on the other hand, breadless meals were common. However, as there was no limit on the amount of fat meat, the boys did not suffer from this kind of diet. Had the meat been lean, they would have felt starved in spite of eating large quantities of it.

Dick and Ben understood now that Sam

had been right when he told them that a small party would have a much better chance to live on the country, that is on game, than a large party.

A small party, which can travel quietly without stringing out can get within range of game, when a large party by its noise and numbers will scare the game out of the country. This principle was so well known to the early explorers of the plains and the mountains that fairly large parties, like those of Lewis and Clark, always sent one or two hunters ahead of the main body.

The boys also appreciated that a small party on horseback is not nearly so likely to be delayed by all kinds of accidents.

In the ford of the Big Blue they had found a wagon, upside down, with two wheels and one axle broken beyond repair. This accident had probably delayed all the wagons following, at least an hour. Broken wheels, abandoned chests and boxes, the bones of horses and cattle, picked clean by wolves and coyotes marked the trail here and there, and on a low ridge, miles away from any other landmark, they passed a lone grave marked

with a rude wooden cross. The mound of earth was covered with stones to keep the coyotes from digging into it.

In silence and with bowed heads the four youths passed the lonely spot. Men, women, and children, who crossed the wild plains and mountains in those days, might be laid to rest in a grave which no friend or member of the family would ever be able to visit again.

Some miles beyond the lone grave a range of low glistening sand-hills with a scattered vegetation appeared on the horizon.

Sam took out his spy-glass and examined them carefully. When he said something to Al about those hills being a good hiding-place for Indians, Ben slipped out of his saddle and tied his picket-rope to the dog. Prince did not enjoy traveling in this way, for he dropped his tail and walked along as if very much ashamed and depressed.

The lads scouted carefully up to and through these hills, known at that time as the Coasts of the Platte, but they could discover no indication of men or animals.

When they had passed through these low dunes of sand which the northwest wind had

blown up from the bottom of the broad channel of the river, they came into full view of the Platte, one of the most remarkable rivers of the plains.

Several channels in a sort of network threaded their way with a rapid current over an expanse of sand-bars, about a mile wide. Patches of willow and other bushes as well as green grasses and rushes relieved the eye from the monotony of sand-bars; while bleached trunks, stumps, and branches of driftwood showed that at times of high water the Platte tried to emulate the Mississippi and be a real river. But in the yielding and shifting sand of its bed it had never been able to cut a deep channel.

For over a hundred miles the trail now followed the broad valley of the Platte almost straight west.

The boys missed the picturesque curves and high wooded hills of the Mississippi and Missouri. The sandy flat, showing the expanse of high water ran as straight as the trail that followed its sweep. Only a few wooded islands broke the monotony of the valley which was from eight to ten miles wide.

It was not always possible for the lads to camp near the channel, but they always found plenty of good water by digging wells only a few feet deep, for in dry seasons much of the water of the Platte creeps toward the Missouri as an underground flow.

In these camps the lads also learned to use a new kind of fuel. They gathered armfuls of driftwood for boiling or roasting their meat, and although the emigrants had used much of this fuel, Sam's party had no difficulty in gathering a supply.

The two small boys wished very much to build a big warm camp-fire after dark, but Sam did not think it would be wise.

"We have not been pestered," he argued, "by begging and thieving Indians, and I think we had better not build any signal fires to bring them upon us."

CHAPTER X

STRANGE SOUNDS

FROM the last camp on the Platte near the place where the river forks into the South and North Platte, the lads saw a haze of smoke arise in the distance, and Sam gave it as his opinion that this indicated a camp of Crows or Cheyennes, who were hunting buffaloes south of the South Fork.

Dick and Ben offered to stand guard for a while after dark although Sam did not think that the Indians had yet discovered them.

The sun set like a great ball of red fire beyond the river and made the stream run crimson like a streak of blood between white sandbars and dark patches of scrub willows. From the southwest, banks of black clouds were rising, and were shown from time to time in bold relief by streaks and broad sheets of lightning; and as the clouds rose higher a distant rumbling thunder could be faintly heard.

Before Sam and Al rolled in, they covered

the packs carefully, and placed two heavy pieces of canvas ready to cover their beds in case of a downpour. They had brought a tent with them, but there were no poles at this camp to set it up.

There was no danger from Indians during a night like this; but the youngsters felt so important that nothing would do but they must stand guard, because they were now in the real Indian country.

When the storm finally broke with severe thunder and lightning and a violent wind driving clouds of sand and dust before it, several of the horses tore up their picket-pins and stampeded for shelter toward a willow thicket near the river.

The boys raced after them, but when they reached the thicket into which the animals had disappeared, they heard strange sounds which made them fearful to go any farther.

"It's Indians killing somebody," whispered the imaginative Dick.

"Ah, it isn't," replied Ben, also too scared to speak aloud; "it's bears killing our horses."

At one moment the sound seemed to be a

74 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

groan as if a man tried to cry for help, but was too far gone to utter any words; then it seemed to be an unearthly rattle or gurgle as of some monsters in deadly combat.

"Let's run and call Sam," urged Dick. "There are Indians in there, I tell you. Can't you hear them fight?"

"Sam, come quick!" Ben called, when they reached camp. "Three of our horses have run away, and I guess the Indians have got them."

Sam and Al were already looking for the lost boys and horses.

"You fool kids!" Sam scolded them, "you didn't picket the horses right. Did you see the Indians?"

"No, we didn't see them," Dick informed him. "But they are in there, in the willows. We heard them fighting or killing somebody."

The three boys soon arrived at the thicket, while Al and Prince had been left to guard the camp.

For a moment Sam was puzzled. Could it be possible that some Indians had outwitted him, before he had even suspected their presence?

“There they are! There they are!” cried Dick, as the blood-curdling sound again came from the river.

But the gruesome sound did not scare Sam a bit. On the contrary, he began to laugh aloud.

“That’s no Indian, thank God. That’s a horse in distress. One of our horses has snarled himself up in the picket-rope and is choking to death. Follow me, quick! We must save him.”

However, to their surprise, the three horses were all quietly munching brush and grass near the river.

“Well, that beats me,” Sam remarked. “It surely was the call of a horse in trouble. These critters aren’t in trouble. Where on earth did that sound come from?”

Just then they heard it again, and Ben and Dick felt the hair rise on their heads.

“Great heavens!” cried Sam. “Look, a lost horse, mired in the quicksand!”

By the time Ben and Dick had made out a dark form on the other side of a narrow channel, Sam had waded across and tried to help the animal.

"Bring me two picket-ropes, quick!" he called. "He is going down. I can stand on this snag, while I tie the ropes around his neck. We must try to save him."

When he had tied the ropes he told the two lads to fasten the other ends to their saddles and pull.

"Steady, boys, steady!" he called to them. "His legs may be caught in a snag. All right now! Pull again, he's coming. Go ahead! pull him across. Whoa, now!"

When the mired animal had been dragged upon the sand-bank like so much dead weight, Sam quickly took the ropes off, and when he found that the horse had no broken legs, he urged him gently to get up on his feet.

In a few minutes the animal got up, but was still nervous and trembling. Sam patted him on the neck, while Dick and Sam rubbed the mud off his flanks with some willow brush, and after a while he followed them to camp of his own accord, where he greeted the other horses with a glad whinny.

"Well," declared Sam to Al, "the youngsters had quite a scare; but I am glad they

called me. Within a very short time this poor creature would have choked and drowned in the quicksand."

The small boys wondered how he got into the river and where he came from.

Sam told them that he was undoubtedly a horse lost or abandoned by the emigrants.

"He may have been sick or lame, and he stayed near the river, where he found plenty of grass and water. Wolves and coyotes that follow every train, probably kept him from going near the trail and following the train. When he got the wind of our horses he tried to join them and fell into a mass of quicksand. If he had grown up on the plains, he would have been more careful about his footing. But even wild animals get mired or drowned sometimes. Buffaloes, for instance, break through the ice in spring and thousands of them drown; but Indian ponies and wild horses are very careful about their footing."

Sam decided to make an early start in the morning, because he feared that some hunting party from the Indian camp might come down the fork; but the two small boys were so

sleepy after their adventure that Al had to take the blankets away from them to make them get up.

Thus far things had gone well with Sam's party. They had made excellent time, no Indians had troubled them, and they had just picked up a fine horse. The boys called him Grunter, and when the caravan started Grunter joined them, apparently glad to have found company.

Their supply of meat was about gone now, but Sam expected to find game within the next few days. After they had turned north and crossed the South Fork, they did indeed see both elk and deer, but the animals were so far away from the trail that they could not hunt them without delaying the train at least half a day, and Sam would not listen to any such plan.

"Travel, travel! Keep a-going!" was his constant admonition.

"After we have crossed the North Fork, we ought to find buffalo, and a fat buffalo will keep us in meat for a month."

The aspect of the country was now gradually changing. The North and South Fork

ran with a swift current through deep rocky valleys, which some distance above their junction deepened and narrowed into canyons. Broad-leaved trees filled the narrow valleys, while dark pines and cedars arose from rocky bluffs and hills like sentinels of the mountains, which the travelers were approaching.

The lads reached the ford of the North Platte on a Sunday, and as both men and animals were much fatigued with the constant rapid travel, they decided to make this a day of rest in camp.

To appreciate a Sunday in camp, one must have traveled hard through heat and cold, through storm and rain. One must have rolled up in his blankets with the feeling that he must rise again before the summer stars fade away, and that to-morrow and the next day and the next he must travel, travel; till his limbs ache and his eyes grow weary, and till the faithful animal that carries him plods along with a drooping head and a stumbling gait. These are the experiences one must have undergone to appreciate Sunday in camp.

Now there was time to have a real invig-

orating swim in the cool current of the river, and stroll up and down the stream to pick wild cherries and service-berries to mix with their dried beef. And after a real Sunday dinner from which pan-bread, dried fruit, and sweet coffee were not omitted, what a pleasure it was to stretch out in the shade and let the eye follow buzzards and eagles draw their graceful spirals in mid-air, and lazily watch the fleecy summer clouds float eastward!

And while thus stretched at ease on the banks of the wild river, their memory flitted back to childhood scenes in Illinois, and their fancy took wings to the distant Pacific and the Willamette Valley.

Where did Father and Mother spend the Sunday? Had they safely doubled the dangerous Cape Horn? What a lot of stories they would have to exchange, when the families would be once more united.

"Boys," asked Sam after a while, "did you ever think of the Bible verses Mother used to like so much? Listen just a little while. It seems to me that I had to travel over the plains to understand them.

"Who maketh the clouds his chariots:

who walketh upon the wings of the wind.

“ ‘He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills.

“ ‘He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man.’ ”

The two small boys had made a discovery, which they were eager to follow up.

“ ‘May Dick and I go fishing?’ ” asked Ben. “ ‘We saw some big ones in a deep hole just a little way up.’ ”

Sam had no objection. “ ‘But you have no bait,’ ” he suggested. “ ‘What are you going to catch them with?’ ”

But that objection did not deter the two young travelers.

Ben soon produced some hooks and lines. In a shallow pool they caught enough minnows with their hands and hats, and before supper time, they came into camp jubilant, with a fine string of pike.

“ ‘How are you going to eat them?’ ” Sam teased. “ ‘We have no butter to fry them in.’ ”

“ ‘Aw, go on, Sam,’ ” Ben argued. “ ‘You don’t need butter in camp.

“ ‘Al, you can fix them. Can’t you?’ ”

And Al did fix them by frying them in

82 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

bacon fat and seasoning them with salt, pepper, and wild onions, so that Sam admitted that they were the best fish he ever ate.

In the evening the lads sat on a high rock above the river and watched the sun sink into the plain and tint the clouds with pink, red, and orange. Thus ended their Sunday on the Platte.

CHAPTER XI

THE CROW'S THREAT

THE lads had traveled the five hundred miles from Fort Leavenworth without serious difficulty. But they were now entering upon the dangerous part of the trail.

If, however, they could get over the next hundred and sixty miles and reach Fort Laramie in the present state of Wyoming, they were ready to enter the mountains.

At that place the American Fur Company maintained a post where repairs could be made and fresh horses and all kinds of supplies could be secured; that is, if one had money or furs or other goods to offer in exchange.

At this point travelers crossing the plains could also enjoy a few days of rest without fearing that their animals would be run off or their scalps lifted by lawless bands of Indians.

In high spirits the lads followed the well-marked trail on the south side of the North Platte and expected to reach the well-known camping-place near Courthouse Rock in the evening.

The character of the country was now rapidly changing. Hills and buttes and much broken country appeared everywhere, and in the afternoon they could plainly see Jail Rock and Courthouse Rock looming up high and bare against the western sky.

They were urging their horses into a rapid gait around a spur of low bare cliffs, when they came suddenly face to face with some mounted Indians.

"Hang it," muttered Sam, "a bunch of Crow horse-thieves! A bad bunch! Keep cool, boys! No shooting unless I give the word, but be ready for the worst."

Sam signaled to the Indians not to approach, and both parties came to a stop.

Some of the Crows were armed with guns, and some with bows and arrows.

One of the Indians dismounted, laid down his arms and approached on foot.

To this Sam could not object without of-

fending the Indians and probably bringing on a fight. Therefore Sam also dismounted and awaited the leader.

After the usual greeting the Indian told Sam in signs that he and his braves were going on the war-path against the Pawnees and that they wanted more horses.

"You have many horses. Give us some," he concluded.

"We need our horses," Sam told him. "We are going to Fort Laramie and Fort Hall."

"Trade horses," signaled the Crow. "Our horses are tired, yours are fresh, and you travel slow. We must go fast or the Pawnees will catch us."

Sam felt that this was only a ruse to rob them of all their horses and their goods. Moreover, his party had no use for a lot of scrawny, half-wild Indian ponies.

"We wish to keep our own horses," he replied firmly. "Your horses cannot carry our packs, and are too small for the white man's wagons and plows."

"Stingy, white dogs," the Crow said, and started to lead off one of the horses.

Sam knew, if he allowed this, the Indians would rob them at once of all their free horses, and during the night would try to stampede the others and help themselves to their goods. The journey to Oregon would end right there, and most likely they would all be killed. All this flashed through Sam's mind in a second. So, before the Indian could lead the horse away, Sam stepped up and tried to take the halter rope out of his hand, and as the Indian resisted Prince sprang up and seized him by the shoulder, while Sam gave him a push forward, saying:

“Get away! Go back to your men!”

The Indian stumbled forward and Sam called off the angry dog.

The other Indians were getting their bows and guns ready for an attack, and Sam called to his men to get behind the horses and be ready for a fight.

When the Indians saw that they could not bully or scare this small party of white men into giving up their horses and goods, they drew off to a distance to hold a council.

“Are they going to attack us?” Ben and Dick asked anxiously.

"We shall know pretty soon," Sam answered. "I think they would, if they had not seen how well armed we are, and that we mean to fight, if necessary."

"Watch them!" Al said pointing to the Reds. "The leader is coming on horseback. Maybe he wants to trade for Prince. Perhaps he will give you his pony for him."

"He can't get him!" exclaimed Ben. "I don't want his skinny old pony."

When the Crow came within good sign talking distance he stopped and began to make signs.

"What does he say?" asked Ben, not being quite sure but that the Crow, having learned the great merits of Prince, did now want to get his dog, as long as he could not get any horses.

"He doesn't want your dog," Sam explained, laughing. "He is telling us what he thinks of us. He says: 'White dogs. Squaws. Afraid to fight. White dogs. We rub you out.'"

"Sam, I wouldn't take that," exclaimed Ben, "if I was as big as you are. Why don't you ride over and lick him? Wouldn't you,

Dick? Let me sick Prince at him! Prince will show him who is a squaw."

"A fine bunch of Indian fighters you would make," Sam replied laughing. "You and Dick and the dog!

"Let me tell you something. A good plainsman and trapper does most of his Indian-fighting with his head. He keeps cool and uses his wits, and in that way he saves his powder for the few occasions when he has to fight with guns in order to save his goods or his life.

"Why, boys, that Crow with his deaf-and-dumb show is just a joke. Let him send all the cuss-words he knows. What do we care? If he were not afraid of us, he would have our goods and horses now and—perhaps our scalps, too."

"What's he saying now?" asked Ben, who was intently watching the gesticulating Indian.

"Wait a minute," Sam consented good-naturedly; "let me see if I can make it out. He talks pretty fast.

"He says, 'Dead skunks— Rotten dogs—

Gophers. Run to your holes.' There he goes at it again. 'White dogs. Scared squaws. Rub you out.'

"All right, Mr. Crow. When you begin the rubbing-out, you will find us ready."

"Rub you out," the Indian signaled once more, before he turned around and rode away with his men.

The boys realized that they had had a narrow escape from a fight. That Crow with his deaf-and-dumb talk had tried to provoke the boys into some false move. If one of the boys had separated from the others, or if the Crow had been able to scatter their horses, there would have been serious trouble.

"That fellow is a great liar," Sam expressed his opinion, after they had talked the whole situation over. "He is not leading a war-party against the Pawnees. If he were, they would not turn around and ride off westward. The Pawnees live directly east of this region, on the Loup Fork of the Platte. I guess he took us for a bunch of green boys, who know nothing of the plains and of Indians.

“You fellows stay bunched right here. I will just climb that cliff and follow them with my spy-glass.”

When Sam returned, his face looked troubled and thoughtful.

“What is it, Sam?” asked Al. “Are they coming back?”

“No, worse than that,” explained Sam. “There is a camp of about fifty tepees right on the trail just this side of Courthouse Rock. And I saw a herd of buffaloes about five miles south of this place. Our friends are riding slowly toward the big camp at Courthouse Rock. I think they have been scouting all day for buffalo, and their horses are tired.”

“That is surely bad news,” admitted Al. “How in the world are we going to get past them?”

CHAPTER XII

TRAVELING BY THE NORTH STAR

SAM agreed that they were in a dangerous position, but he was trying to figure out what the real feeling of the Crows was, what they might plan, and what they were likely to do.

If any man in the emigrant train had injured a member of the Crow tribe, these Indians would surely take revenge on this small party of whites, if it seemed safe to do so.

The Crows they had met were certainly in an ugly mood. Their request for horses and for trading had been refused and their leader had been firmly, if not roughly handled. Evidently the packs of the white men had aroused the cupidity of the Crows, who had a bad reputation as thieves and robbers of small parties.

“Couldn’t we buy them off?” Al suggested.

"We could spare a horse or two and some goods."

"I don't think we could," Sam argued. "We are too small a party and if they once get us into their camp, we are at their mercy. They will see at once that it is just as safe and just as easy for them to take everything we have as to accept a small gift.

"If we give them a horse or two, some goods and ammunition, we shall only whet their appetites, and they will want more, till they have cleaned us out.

"We cannot trade with them, because they have nothing we can use. We don't wish to buy robes and furs; we want to get to Oregon.

"Here is the amount, boys, of the whole business," Sam concluded. "Of those seven I would not be afraid. I believe we could drop that whole bunch without getting a scratch. Their old guns and their bows are no match for our arms. I saw to that, before we started.

"But that big camp we can't handle. If we get into a fight, enough of them will dog us day and night till they wear us out, steal our horses, and pick us off one by one.

“If we enter their camp, we are helpless. The only safe thing I can think of is to slip away from them, lose them, and vanish away so they can’t find us.”

Al did not think that they would be hurt, if they openly entered the camp as friends. Sam granted that Indian rules of hospitality would probably insure their safety, while they were in camp; but he explained that Indians thought it all right to follow a party and rob them and kill them, if they had a grudge against them.

“And I fear,” Sam warned, “that the party we met will stir up the whole camp against us.”

After they had discussed their dangerous situation a little more, Sam decided that they should take no chances on being well treated and allowed to go their way by a lot of thievish, heathen Crows.

There was only an hour of daylight left, and the Indians would expect them to camp on some small stream or water-hole this side of Courthouse Rock.

“If we do that,” Sam felt sure, “they will try some time after dark to stampede our

horses, and we shall have to fight them off.

“A fight once started, we shall have the whole mob after us, for Indians never ask ‘Who started the fight?’ or ‘Who is to blame for it?’ ”

The time had come, when they had to act on the advice of the old mountaineer at the Big Blue. They must leave the trail, whatever might happen. The present danger had to be met.

They followed for a short distance the trail of the Crows but as soon as they came to some hard, rocky prairie, they scattered and turned straight north for the river, the North Platte, which each one forded separately, leading one or two horses.

Having crossed the river they camped to let the horses drink, pick some food, and enjoy a short rest.

Al in the meantime had built, in a rocky hollow, a small smokeless fire of dry wood over which he fried a panful of bacon and brewed a kettleful of coffee. Sugar, dried beef, and biscuit completed the meal, and Sam told the boys to eat all they wanted, because

it might be some time before they would get another meal.

As soon as the cooking was finished, Sam poured water on the fire, and an hour later, the whole train was again on the march.

"There will be some puzzled Crow scouts to-night trying to find our camp along the old trail," Sam chuckled. "And to-morrow there will be a lot of them wondering what big medicine the green white boys had to enable them to fly away like birds."

"Don't you think they will track us?" asked Dick seriously.

"I doubt it," Sam laughed. "I think they will figure that we struck out southwest for the Fort St. Vrain and Fort Laramie trail. If they do, they will never hear or see anything of us again."

"Sam, have you that Shawnee medicine?" asked Ben.

"Of course I have it," Sam replied gayly, "but I am not depending on it."

"Well, it has brought us luck so far," remarked his young brother.

"Ben, you little fool," Sam joked. "I de-

clare, if you aren't already turning heathen. What would Mother think, if she knew you were believing in Indian medicine?"

"Why do you carry it, if you don't believe in it?" asked Ben, a little peeved at being made fun of.

"I carry it," Sam spoke, "as a rare keepsake from an old friend whom I shall probably never see again, and who gave me what he valued most. I promised that I would take it all the way to Oregon, and to Oregon it will go, if I ever get there."

After a while, little Dick, noticing that they were no longer following the river, asked Al how they would find water; but Al assured him that, although the country looked quite desolate as compared with Illinois or Missouri, it was not a desert, and they should find plenty of water even if they did not always travel in sight of a stream as they had done every day since they left Fort Leavenworth on the Missouri.

For a few miles they followed the buffalo trails, which in those days led from all directions on the plains to the nearest river. But when the buffalo trails faded out, and

Sam struck right into the sand-hills winding this way and that way without following a trail of any kind and without ever looking at his compass, Ben also became uneasy.

Although the lads had made nearly six hundred miles, they had followed a plain trail, or really a road all the time. The two younger boys had been warned against getting lost, and now they both felt quite sure that Sam was getting lost. The country they thought began to look much like some old pictures they had seen of the Desert of Sahara, where both men and camels were buried by terrible sand-storms.

The horses went on a slow walk, even Prince seemed to find walking hard. A few wolves and coyotes were heard howling, and the faint light of the stars made the sand-hills look like a strange spooky world to the small boys, who besides getting tired, were not accustomed to travel by night.

Finally Ben could not hold back any longer. "Sam," he asked, "do you know where we are going? We have not had a trail for a long time. Why don't you look at your compass?"

"Why no, brother," Sam teased, "I don't

know exactly, where we are going. We are just going."

"Look at your compass! Why don't you?" the small boy urged in an anxious tone of voice.

"The compass could not tell me," Sam now spoke in a quieting tone of voice. "Don't you know how I am traveling? I am just going by the North Star, holding about five degrees east of it as near as I can. But it makes no difference whether we go a little farther east or west."

Then Sam and Al had to explain that the North Star never sets and how one can find it; and that the Dipper never sets, but swings in a circle all around the North Star. These things had never meant much to the smaller boys, until this night, when their big brother rode calmly into the wildest country they could imagine, setting his course by the North Star.

"Then you know where you are going?" Ben asked again after a while.

"All I need to know, brother, is that we are going straight into the sand-hills. Don't you see the plan? We want to lose those In-

dians that were so nice to us to-day. We can't do it by going where they expect us to go. For that reason, we are heading straight into the sand-hills, because that is a region where few white men ever go."

CHAPTER XIII

SPOTTED WOLF

SPOTTED WOLF was the name of the Crow renegade who had nearly brought on a fight with Sam's party. He had once listened to a trapper telling his Indian friends that the whites had a big air medicine, which would make a tepee go up to the clouds. Spotted Wolf did not get from this story a very clear idea of a balloon ascension, which the trapper tried to relate, but he did remember that the whites had some big medicine which made things go up in the air.

Sam had not quite read the mind of Spotted Wolf correctly. He did not make allowance for the pride and boastfulness of such Indians as Spotted Wolf and his band of young Indian toughs. They did not say a word about being ill-treated by white men or having a dog sicked on their leader. They had a plan of securing fame and booty and a lot of coups out of this small foolish band of white men.

They did ride to the main camp, where they ate a big meal of buffalo meat and provided themselves with fresh horses. Each brave also took a buffalo robe, not because the night might be cool, but because waving a buffalo robe while letting out their devilish yells was a most effective way of stampeding the white men's cattle and horses.

When the sun had set, Spotted Wolf and his cut-throats quietly rode away eastward. They were careful not to tell the chief of the village anything about their plans, for the old man was a friend of the whites and would have forbidden Spotted Wolf to molest the travelers. If they came back with horses, booty, and scalps, the whole village would go wild, and they could easily tell that the white men had begun the fight.

There is a small stream known to-day as Greenwood Creek which the Oregon Trail crossed about five miles northeast of Courthouse Rock. This was a good place for a small party to camp, and this place Spotted Wolf and his band quietly approached under cover of darkness. They were much surprised at not finding the white boys there.

Perhaps they had not come quite so far. They might have gone into camp at some place near the river. So the Crow bandits rode slowly along the trail to the place where they had met the boys in the afternoon.

The boys were gone. There was no sight or sound of them. The red wolves were very much puzzled and lay down to sleep, intending to follow the trail of their intended victims in the morning.

When daylight came they found it as easy to track their victims as they had expected. The white boys had left the Oregon Trail and gone southwest, but that did not deceive Spotted Wolf. He knew what that meant. They were running away. They were going to reach the white man's trail that ran north along the foothills to Fort Laramie. The big white boy had foolishly told him they were going to Fort Laramie. Spotted Wolf did not have to follow in their actual tracks. He knew the country and knew where they could go and where they could not go. But he spread out his party over a stretch of two miles to make sure that he would run them down. They rode hard all day and the next

day without seeing any sign of their victims.

Some of the men began to be dissatisfied and wanted to go back, but Spotted Wolf harangued them into staying. They reached the Fort Laramie Trail and had still seen no white men. Here they met a party of trappers going south. Of these they were really afraid and acted very friendly to them, telling them at the same time that four white men had stolen some of their horses and robes; but the trappers had not seen any white men.

For a while Spotted Wolf was puzzled. His renown as a warrior was at stake. He could not admit that he had made a mistake and had never found the trail of the white boys. In this bad fix, he remembered the trapper's story of the big air medicine.

There was something strange about this party, he told his men. He had seen it right away. Four young boys had never been known to cross the plains alone. They were so bold and brave, because they knew they had a big medicine.

He was sure they had had the big air med-

icine that makes horses and men and packs go up to the clouds. Many of the white men were medicine men.

These men had lifted themselves up like birds and had flown over the two rocks (Jail Rock and Courthouse Rock) after dark.

All the men, except one, believed this story. He had never heard, he replied in answer to the leader's long harangue, that the whites had a big air medicine, and while he knew they had many powerful medicines which the Indians did not have, he thought these white boys were too young to be medicine-men.

He thought they had turned around and gone back on the trail. Another big train of white men with tepee wagons and many horses and spotted buffaloes was coming through the Indian country on their way across the Shining Mountains. The four boys had traveled ahead of that train, and when they met Spotted Wolf and his warriors their hearts became faint and they rode back to the train. That was the way they had disappeared.

"We should find the big train," he finished. "We could easily steal some spotted buf-

faloes and mules and horses from them. Maybe we could take some scalps. Then our women will be glad and there will be a big scalp-dance in camp."

But Spotted Wolf could not allow this plan to prevail, for it meant turning the leadership of the party over to another man.

It was doubtful, he replied, that a big train of white men was coming. None of the Crow scouts had seen it and if there was such a train they could not overtake it before it reached Fort Laramie. He had a better plan, which he was sure they could carry out and which would bring them all much fame and wealth.

He knew that one day's journey south there was always a big summer camp of the Arapahoes with many horses.

They should go and steal horses from the Arapahoes. The Arapahoes would not be watching their horses, because they did not expect the Crow warriors to come so far south.

The argument of the wily Wolf prevailed and the party set out for the Arapahoe camp.

They found an unguarded herd of about a

hundred ponies an hour before daylight and immediately started north with them, feeling very big about the success of their plan and already seeing themselves as rich and famous men among the Crows.

At daylight the Arapahoes discovered what had happened and a large party of their bravest warriors, mounted on good horses, set out in pursuit of their enemies.

They came in sight of the stolen horses long before the noon hour. The Crows had been too much in a hurry to stop for changing horses, and it was too late to do so, when they discovered that they were being pursued by a big war party.

For a while they urged their horses and the stolen herd to the utmost speed, but the Arapahoes, mounted on fresh horses, and nearly all leading an extra horse, were fast gaining on them, so they abandoned the stolen horses and fled for their lives in different directions. But each Crow was pursued by four or five Arapahoes, and it was not long before six of the Crows were killed and scalped. Spotted Wolf alone had left his horse and crawled into a ravine, where his

pursuers could not follow on horseback. But feeling sure that the only remaining Crow was still in the ravine, they signaled to their friends, surrounded the place, and searched for their victim. They found him crouching under some bushes of buffalo-berry, and they shot him full of arrows, before he had time to leave his hiding-place.

In this way it happened that the war party of Spotted Wolf never came back, a fate not uncommon in Indian warfare.

It was not till a month later that the Crows learned through some white traders that the Arapahoes had danced three nights around the scalps of Spotted Wolf and his men.

However the mourning in the Crow camp was not as great as would have been the case for the loss of really respected warriors. The squaw of Spotted Wolf and the mothers of the young men, whom the old scoundrel had led into evil ways each cut off one of their fingers and gashed themselves, and made several nights hideous with their cries of mourning. But most of the men in camp were glad that Spotted Wolf was gone. "For," said they, "he always got us into trouble with the whites

and into useless war with our Indian neighbors. He was a bad man, who did not love his people. His tongue was double, and he led our young men into evil ways. It is good that he must live in the land of spirits without his scalp."

CHAPTER XIV

A STRANGE COUNTRY

AFTER Ben and Dick understood how Sam followed his course by the stars, they lost their anxiety and followed the leader without worrying about their destination.

None of the boys, however, except Sam realized from how great a danger they had escaped. For, ever since white men and red men came into contact, have lawless Indians and bad white men caused much of the trouble between the two races and made impossible a peaceful settlement of the very serious Indian problem, which from about 1840 to 1880 caused the many bloody conflicts in the region between the Mississippi and the Pacific coast.

Sam kept his party traveling till about midnight. By that time he felt reasonably sure that they had eluded Spotted Wolf, even if their trail should be found and followed. He had been thinking over the events of the day as he silently wound about among the

white sand-hills, dotted with dark patches of grass and low bushes. Instinctively he had felt that Spotted Wolf had evil designs, for his year with the traders had taught him much about Indian ways and Indian character. Indeed without that experience it would have been madness to try crossing the plains and the mountains. But even now he felt that perhaps he had taken too great a risk, not so much for himself as for the other three boys. However, he cut off these thoughts as entirely useless. They were in the game now and had to see it through.

When they came to a small lake surrounded by a meadow of some ten acres, Sam called a halt.

"Dick and Ben," he ordered, "you roll up and go to sleep. Al, I think you and I had better hobble the horses, although I do not believe they would leave this meadow. It would be no use to picket them, because the pins would all pull up in this sandy soil.

"No Indians can find us here before daylight and Prince will keep the coyotes from our meat and bacon. I guess he is good for something, anyhow."

"You bet he is," Ben broke a long silence. And before he rolled in, he covered Prince with a piece of canvas, for the clear starry night had grown quite cool, and Prince was a short-haired dog.

In the morning Prince was lying on top of his blanket, but around the camp were many tracks of coyotes, and a number of the animals were sitting, like dark specters, on the sand-hills all around them. However, the boys had all slept so soundly that none of them had heard Prince drive the hungry beasts away.

"That dog," remarked Sam, "doesn't even know enough to go back under his blanket."

But Ben had caught the twinkle in Sam's eye and merely replied: "That's all right. I don't think any dog does. I don't care what you say about him. He is my dog, and you can't get him back."

Sam had to cook breakfast over a fire of buffalo chips, *bois de vache*, as the French hunters and trappers called it, for there was no wood in sight, except small sprays of sand-cherries, which grew in beautiful green patches on the sand-hills. The fruit with which the bushes were laden had already

turned red, but was still far from being ripe, and could not be eaten without being cooked and mixed with sugar.

When breakfast was over Sam asked the boys to sit down for a council of war.

“What do you think, big warriors,” he opened the council with mock gravity, “about finding a good camp with plenty of grass, wood, and water, and then making a big hunt for buffalo and elk? Al says we have only one piece of dried beef left. Ben and Dick, you eat as if you were being paid big money for destroying beef and bacon.

“Al and I will go after the game. Ben and Dick will be squaws and dry and smoke the meat and cook our meals, when we come home.”

Ben and Dick wondered if Spotted Wolf would not track them into this place, but when Sam asked them to go back half a mile and look at the trail, they found that even the gentle wind, which had been blowing for about an hour had almost filled their tracks with sand.

Al agreed with Sam that it would be a good plan for them to hunt and cure meat for

a few days, so that they would have enough to last them to Fort Laramie.

The small boys doubted that they would find any game in the sand-hills, because thus far they had only seen coyotes and a few rabbits; but Sam assured them that some trappers, who had been in the region, had found game fairly plentiful.

It was not long before they had the packs on the horses and were in the saddle themselves, not so much to escape from Indians as to find a good hunting camp.

It was only now, while traveling leisurely in the daytime that they began to take in the character of this strange country.

It was not a prairie nor was it mountainous, and it was far from being a desert. It was a confusion of ridges and sand-hills of all sizes and heights, some looking like small mountains almost two hundred feet high. Some of them were almost bare, showing only a scattered growth of sand-binding grasses. Others were covered in patches with a growth of sand-cherry, choke-cherry, wild plums, hackberry, and other stunted tree growth.

They traveled along leisurely till noon,

when they stopped on the bank of a clear little stream. The boys were surprised to find such a stream in the sand-hills, but they were still more surprised and interested to find it full of lively small fish. However, there was not grass and wood enough for a camp of several days, and after eating their noon lunch, they started again in search of a good hunting camp.

As Sam had never been in this region before, he kept a general northerly course, but swung east and west from time to time to make sure that they did not pass a good place.

Several times he climbed to the top of a hill and after traveling several hours, he could see that they were approaching a region, where the meadows, nestled among the bleak hills, were getting more numerous. He even saw several elk and deer and, in the distance, a few buffaloes.

The lads rejoiced at the appearance of game, but still a good camp site they had not yet found. They passed sand-hill after sand-hill, and more sand-hills and sand-ridges.

"Where does all this sand come from?" asked Ben.

But Sam had no answer to this question. As far as he knew it had always been there and he thought it would take the wind a long time to blow it away. For the wind seemed to be always building up one hill and cutting down another. In the sides of some hills, the boys discovered great holes, fifty feet or even more than a hundred feet deep. Some of these holes, now called blow-holes, were bare pits, in others grasses, weeds, and bushes had secured a footing and seemed to be trying to bind the sand and keep the wind from rolling it over the top to the next hill.

In fact the whole country looked like a region where wind and plants had waged a long and bitter warfare; the wind trying to blow the land away, while grasses, weeds, and bushes were trying hard to hold it in place and cover it with a green carpet as they had done on the plains and in the country farther east. Thus far the wind still had the better of the fight, for it was quite plain that no hill had very long kept the same shape, but the foot of many of them was well covered with plants.

On one point, however, the boys all felt entirely at ease. They saw that they would

have no difficulty in finding water. They had already passed several small lakes and ponds, and had noticed several springs, and had even crossed two or three small streams. Whether these streams grew larger and finally reached the Platte to the south or the Niobrara to the north, or lost themselves among the countless sand-hills, the lads did not know.

"I thought the sand-hills were here," remarked Al, "because this country had very little rainfall, but if that were true, the lakes and streams would be dry now. Then why are the sand-hills here, if it is not on account of drought?"

"Too hard a question for me," Sam admitted, looking with wonder upon the weird, fantastic scene around them. "All I know is that they are here."

"Say, Sam," asked Ben, "do you suppose some day the wind will blow all this sand into to Platte? If it does, there won't be any Platte. It's almost choked with sand now."

"Ask me something about Indians," Sam answered in reply. "I am not a professor of geology."

If Sam did not like to answer questions, he had made a bad suggestion for his own ease; for his young brother and cousin apparently had stored up a good many questions on this very subject.

Where did he think Spotted Wolf was now? Had he found their trail? Would he follow them clear into the heart of the sand-hills, or would he lose the trail and give it up? Was he a brave Indian? Had Sam had any trouble with him last year? Were all his men bad Indians? Did it hurt much to be hit with an arrow?

“Now, that will do, that will do!” Sam finally exclaimed in self-defense. “Do you fellows think I’m an encyclopedia on Spotted Wolf and Indians in general?”

“I hope he has not found our trail, but if he has, I hope that a sand-storm will bury his bones deep down under the biggest hill. He is a bad Indian and ought to come to a bad end. He is the one Indian I know, at whom I would not regret drawing a bead, if I had to. Maybe we shall learn something about his doings, when we reach Fort Laramie.

“Now keep still for a while, so I don’t forget that we came in here to look for a hunting camp.”

“I thought,” Ben blurted out, “we came here to get away from the Indians?”

“You dry up, now, youngster!” Sam threatened. “Or I’ll chuck you head-first into this blow-hole.”

CHAPTER XV

THE HUNTING CAMP

AFTER traveling till the middle of the afternoon, they came to a place, where a lake of considerable size lay in a large fine meadow. Out of the lake ran a small stream and there was considerable tree growth along the stream and in patches and pockets along the foot of the hills.

This looked like a good place, and they decided to camp there, at least, for the night.

After they had eaten supper and arranged everything for the night, Sam took the dog with him and went back a mile on the trail, where he climbed the highest hill and carefully looked over the crest with his glass without exposing himself. He had learned that the price of safety is unremitting watchfulness, and had heard of too many parties that had come to grief through lack of caution.

He felt reasonably sure that no enemy was following them, but he also knew that seeing

no Indians is no evidence of the absence of Indians. He scanned the country for miles around him, but could detect no sign of the presence of human beings. No smoke indicated any camp, and the game he saw here and there showed no sign of having been disturbed by hunters. He returned to camp shortly after dark and told the boys that they might go to sleep and feel quite safe.

The night was cloudy, so it would be impossible to follow a trail before dawn. They turned the horses loose but again observed the precaution of hobbling them.

Sam, feeling the responsibility of leadership, awoke when the stars were still shining, but he had enjoyed a deep and dreamless sleep after a hard day's travel.

Although he felt that Spotted Wolf had not discovered their tracks, he nevertheless felt it his duty to stand guard till daylight. Some other Indians might have seen them go into camp and might be tempted to run off their good horses; and to be left horseless in the heart of the sand-hills would be a serious predicament.

He took his rifle and pistols and walked

over to the horses, which had straggled a little way west, and herded them slowly back toward the camp. To his own saddle-horse he tied a picket-rope and kept within reach of it, so he could quickly mount the animal in case of danger.

When the stars began to fade he took a position close to the side of his horse, and sharply scanned the bushes along the stream and the copses of brush on the hills, for he knew that any lurking enemies would try to approach the camp under such natural cover. However, at last, the big red disk of the sun rose out of the sand-hills and Sam knew that for the present they were safe.

The day was spent in making the camp habitable and safe. For the first time on the journey, they set up the tent, selecting a shady spot in a small grove of scrubby box-elders and hackberries. Outside of the tent, on all four sides, they placed the packs far enough away from the tent to enable a man to lie down between the tent and the packs. In the center of the small grove, they built a corral for the horses, and between the tent and the corral Ben and Dick built a small

brush house for Prince. To make the camp still more secure, they dug half a dozen pits in a circle just within the edge of the grove, while between the pits they threw up piles and windrows of brush, so a man could, with fair safety, crawl from one pit to another. When their fort was completed, they felt that, in case of attack, they could hold their own against quite a number of Indians.

The construction of cover of this kind was well known and quite generally practiced by the Rocky Mountain trappers of those days, and even the Indians have been known to build crude defenses in their inter-tribal warfare.

The camp being now as well concealed and protected as possible, Sam and Ben set out the next day to hunt in earnest.

They followed the little stream issuing from their lake, and about a mile from camp they came upon a small herd of about a dozen buffaloes. At a distance of a quarter of a mile, they dismounted, Ben remaining with the horses and Sam carefully creeping up within easy range under cover of some willow bushes. The animals had probably

ranged undisturbed in the sand-hills all summer and were not at all wild, so that by two careful shots in the shoulder, Sam dropped two fat animals, before the others became alarmed. The young hunter was careful not to select any large animals, because he knew that their meat was nearly always tough and lean. He did not try to kill more than two because he knew that they could not well take care of any more meat before it would spoil in the warm summer weather.

Cutting up and dressing a buffalo is different from dressing a beef.

The animal was set upon his knees, so to speak, and the skin was split along the back, worked down on either side and spread out on the ground.

The fat meat of the hump was one of the delicacies. The ribs roasted over a hot fire of live coals were also much relished by the old plainsmen and trappers. All the meat that corresponds to the various cuts of beef such as sirloin steak and round steak furnished valuable food; white men, however, often wasted a great deal of it.

The tongue was considered the greatest

delicacy and was always taken, even by the skin-hunters. The tongues were either eaten fresh or dried and smoked. In the heyday of the fur trade from 1832 to 1842 one steamboat might bring to St. Louis 10,000 to 30,000 buffalo-tongues bought from Indians and white hunters on the Yellowstone and upper Missouri.

The white trappers considered a strip of luscious fat a great delicacy. It was called "depuyer" and extended along each side of the backbone right under the skin from the shoulder to the hips. When this was dried and gently smoked it kept indefinitely. Depuyer was eaten like bread with the lean meat by both Indians and mountain men, for men who lived in the open and underwent great physical exertion always felt starved if their food did not contain plenty of fat.

Sam and Ben saved all the meat of their buffalo beeves, the big sheets of suet inside, as well as the liver and heart, leaving only the large bones to be picked clean by wolves and coyotes.

When the meat was all secured, they tied it in the skins and packed it to camp, but

they had to make two trips, before they had it all safe in camp. Here Al and Dick had built a platform of poles and on this they piled it up for the night, covering it with the skins to prevent any sand from being blown on it.

The boys' supper that evening was a feast, such as would have made glad the heart of any old Indian warrior. There was boiled buffalo-tongue with plenty of hot broth seasoned with a little salt and pepper and a handful of the little wild onion bulbs, which grow on top of the stalks. There was a big panful of fried liver and bacon; and on the sweet, black "soup," strong and fragrant coffee, there was no restriction. For a white man, only one thing was lacking, bread.

"Eat all the meat you want, and drink all the white soup and black soup you like," Sam told them. "But this will be a breadless camp. Flour is worth here about a dollar a pound. We might as well learn to live like Indians and trappers, for we are now truly in the Indian country."

While the boys feasted, Prince also had his share; for Ben had trimmed out several ribs

for him, but had purposely left a good deal of meat on the bones.

All the boys, except Sam, slept soundly after their feast, but Prince had a truly bad night of it. Not because he had eaten too much, but because his wild brethren of the sand-hills had smelled the big pile of fresh meat and had come to make a feast.

Before the sun had set, a pack of hungry gray wolves had gathered at the two buffalo skeletons, and when they departed a pack of more hungry coyotes whetted their appetites on the very little that was left.

Unfortunately for the peace of Prince both wolves and coyotes, soon after dark, began to howl among the hills around the camp. Soon they grew bolder and sneaked close up to camp, so the horses became restless in their corral. And from that time on till sunrise, Prince was in a rage of indignation. Now he chased a saucy coyote or two, now he growled fiercely at a bold gray wolf. No sooner had he driven the intruders away from one side of the camp, than they approached stealthily on the other side.

Although Sam knew perfectly well that

neither wolves nor coyotes were at all likely to attack their meat-pile, even he became uneasy, because he feared that the howling around camp might not all come from the throats of wolves and coyotes. So he took a shotgun and slowly walked around on the edge of the grove peering into the moonlit night and straining his ears for sounds of Indians, who deemed it a feat of bravery to steal horses from careless white hunters and trappers.

After an hour he became convinced that no Indians were trying to approach their camp. He thought of tying up the mad, restless dog, but he knew that such a measure would only make Prince growl and whine still more, for, unlike many a boy, Prince took his duties seriously.

When daylight came, the wolves and coyotes dispersed, and Prince retired to his brush house and stretched himself on his canvas bed with the feeling that he had done his duty.

“Roll out, you fellows!” Sam called to the other boys at sunrise, “and get breakfast. Some day a cyclone will drop you all in the Missouri before you wake up. Call me and

Prince, when the meat is cooked. If it hadn't been for us the wolves would have carried you away last night."

CHAPTER XVI

THE ELK HUNT

THE next few days were busy ones for the boys, but days of ease and plenty for the horses.

Sam and Al cut the lean buffalo meat into thin strips, while the two younger boys hung the strips of red meat on scaffoldings of poles. Under some of the meat, they kept a slow fire going, while other strips were being dried in the sun. The latter were to be made into pemmican, the bread of the plains and mountains of those days.

As soon as a lot of meat was thoroughly dried, the boys pounded it into a fine pulp on logs and stumps selected for the purpose. The Indian women used flat rocks and stones in the making of pemmican, but rocks and stones were not to be found at the camp in the sand-hills, so the boys used logs and axes instead.

When a mass of this pulverized meat was

ready, it was placed in a bag of rawhide and hot melted suet was poured over it. To some of the bags the boys added a little sugar and some service-berries, which Ben and Dick had gathered. This made the delicious berry pemmican, and Sam said this was going to furnish some of their Sunday dinners.

Meat prepared in this way kept indefinitely, and was one of the most nourishing foods.

When all the meat was dried and the pemmican was neatly packed in bags, Sam and Al turned their attention to their outfit. Some of their clothing was wearing out, much of it was sadly in need of washing, and saddles and packs needed careful overhauling. The boys were not equipped to shoe their horses, but Sam tightened some of the shoes, and trimmed some of the hoofs from which the shoes had been lost.

During all this time the horses had one grand holiday. There was an abundance of grass and brush. If the sun grew too hot, they sought the shade of the camp grove, where they lazily switched their tails, more from habit than to drive away flies; and no mosquitoes molested them during the cool

night. They all began to look sleek, and even the older ones kicked up their heels and uttered a lusty whinny as if they meant to say, "This is a good country. What's the use of tramping all the way to Oregon?"

If the horses expressed their contentment in their simple equine manner, Ben and Dick approved quite strongly of the country, which had looked so forbidding.

"If our families had not gone ahead to Oregon," they said, "we might as well stay here. Each family could pick a big meadow for raising horses and cattle. We boys could drive them to Fort Leavenworth or Independence every year, and then we could hunt all kinds of game in the sand-hills."

"Can't Dick and I go hunting by ourselves some day? We want to get an elk," begged Ben.

"What do you think, Al?" asked Sam; "is it safe to let the kids go?"

Al thought it was quite safe as they had seen no sign of Indians in the hills.

The two small boys were so eager to go out by themselves that they persuaded Sam to let them go that afternoon. Feeling like

real, big Nimrods of the plains they started in high spirits.

"We'll have some elk pemmican all our own," planned Ben. "Sam said you can make pemmican of deer or elk, only not so much as of a buffalo."

They rode a few miles west of camp to a winding swale, where they had several times observed a small herd of elk. On approaching the place, however, no wild animals were in sight.

"Now, I do wish we had taken the dog," Ben remarked to Dick. "I did not take him because I was afraid he would chase them away. If we had him now, he might find them for us."

Ben had scarcely spoken the last word, when about half a dozen elk, cows, yearlings and calves, suddenly sprang up behind some low bushes and raced away at great speed; and two random shots, which, in their eagerness, the young hunters foolishly sent after them, only made them run the faster.

The young Nimrods were now thoroughly excited, and seeing the elk disappear over a low ridge of sand, they followed them in the

hope of getting a better chance to approach them, not realizing that by their own carelessness, they had lost the very best chance.

When they reached the highest point of the ridge, they again saw the elk on a meadow about a mile away; but they were evidently watching the hunters, and the boys planned to circle around among the hills and try to approach them from the other side.

Making this detour took nearly an hour, and when they finally came within sight of the meadow the elk were gone. Dick did not think this was the meadow they had tried to reach. They should go about half a mile farther in a direction he pointed out.

“Behind those round hills,” he claimed, “you will find our elk. The tracks on this meadow were made by other elk.”

Ben felt so little sure that they had found the right meadow, for all the hills began to look very much alike, that he was ready to follow Dick’s lead.

When they had ridden around the hills Dick had indicated, they found, to their consternation, no meadow and no elk, but only more sand-hills; and to increase their confu-

sion, it was rapidly getting dark and the sky was cloudy.

"Look at your compass, Ben," the younger boy asked anxiously. "Where are we? We turned around so much I don't know which way to go back to camp."

Ben searched through all his pockets, but the compass was gone.

"I must have pulled it out with my handkerchief," he explained. "I haven't it."

In this new difficulty they forgot about the elk they had missed. In what direction was camp? They must return at once, for in half an hour it would be dark.

After some discussion, they started out, both hoping that from the top of the next ridge they would be able to see their camp. Al would surely have made a camp fire to show them the way. But their hearts sank, when from the high ridge, they could see nothing but more ridges and hills of sand in every direction without a sign of life.

By the time they had reached the foot of a high hill ahead of them, it was dark; too dark to distinguish any longer the patches of grass

and bushes on the sand-hills, except on the hill directly in front of them.

It came to them with a feeling of horror that they were lost; lost on a pitch-dark night in the maze of the uninhabited sand-hills. In their bewilderment they had lost all sense of direction, and the wind, which might have given them some clew, had died down.

"Let's climb the hill," suggested Dick. "Maybe we can see the camp-fire."

They tied their horses to some bushes and roots of sand-cherries, and began to climb over loose sand, through bushes and over tufts of tall grass.

Suddenly the ground gave way under their feet, and they tumbled and slid into a deep, black hole of loose sand, fifty feet or more deep.

When they reached the bottom both spit the sand out of their mouths and shook sand, and more sand out of their hair and ears.

"We're alive, Dick," exclaimed Ben, "but we've tumbled into a blow-hole. How in the world can we get back to our horses? Sam and Al will think the Indians caught us."

To climb out of the blow-hole the way they had come in was impossible, but they managed to pick their way out on the opposite side, and then hurried around the hill to the place, where they had tied the horses.

They heard one of the horses neighing and trying to break away. When they reached him, they found that the other one, Dick's horse, was gone, but they could just hear him neigh in the distance.

"We must both get on my horse, quick!" Ben cried, "and try to catch him."

Jim seemed to know just where Buck had gone and seemed anxious to catch up with him, but was unable to do so, for Buck's call became more and more distant.

Then they heard a shot and replied to it with one of their own guns.

"You are great hunters!" Sam called out, when the hatless boys drew up at the camp-fire. "What has happened? Were the Indians after you?"

"No, we didn't see any Indians," the hunters explained humbly, "but we got awfully turned around. Sam, you can't see a thing amongst these beastly sand-hills."

“You fool youngsters,” Sam laughed. “The next time you lose camp, give your horses the reins and let them go. Al, they don’t even know that the horses took them back to camp.”

“Al, have you any supper for us?” asked Ben. “We are awfully hungry. But we have to take a swim first. We are all full of sand, all over.”

After this experience, Ben and Dick were quite willing to go hunting with one of the older boys.

CHAPTER XVII

LOOKING FOR THE TRAIL

THE objects for which Sam had led his company into the sand-hills had now been attained.

They had eluded the Indians and had secured all the meat they could well carry without impeding their travel, and both horses and men were in fine condition.

A few days after the elk hunt everything was ready, and they left the camp at which they had spent some very happy weeks.

All four of them were in high spirits as they wound in and out among the sand-hills, following a general westerly direction. In this way, Sam calculated, they would avoid the big Crow camp, but would again strike the Oregon Trail some twenty-five or fifty miles west of the point, where they had left it, as the trail followed the North Platte in a northwesterly direction for two hundred miles.

One thing they had expected to do in camp they had not done. They carried with them a few choice books, a Bible, a Shakespeare and an account of Oregon, and Al had taken with him a treatise on physics, called natural philosophy in those days. He also had packed away a magnet and a good compass. But they had never looked at a book. The week-days had been too full of work, and on Sundays they had just rested and talked and enjoyed the glory of the summer days and nights.

Although their horses were fresh and active the boys found traveling through the wilderness without following a trail far more laborious than they had expected. At all times they had to watch their direction, and when they started in the morning, they had no idea where they might camp at night.

Game was abundant. Buffalo and elk, deer and antelope stood and gazed at them as if wondering at the strange creatures that had strayed into their solitudes.

The younger boys were much tempted, like most small boys, to fire at the animals that stood or traveled within such easy range,

but Sam would have no foolish gunnery.

"We shall meet enough troublesome Indians," he explained, "without telling them that we are coming. And as for shooting at game that we don't want and could not use, there will be no such senseless and cruel butchery by this party!

"If either of you fire at any bird or beast, just to see if you can hit it, you will do an extra night of guard duty and travel on one meal a day."

Sam and Al had gathered a great deal of information about the Oregon Trail both at Fort Leavenworth and at Independence, but the two younger boys were oppressed by the great solitude, which seemed to be the undisputed country of the wild animals, big and little, grass-eaters and flesh-eaters, but where not a sign was found of either red man or white.

"Sam," asked Dick timidly after they had eaten their supper at the first night's camp, and when the stars were glittering above and the wolves uttering their doleful howls all around them, "do you know where we are?"

"No, Dickie," answered Sam with a

kindly assurance in his voice, "I don't know exactly where we are, but I know that we have been going in the right direction."

"Are you sure we can find the trail again?" Dick resumed his anxious questioning.

"We can't miss it, Dickie, any more than we can miss the Rocky Mountains. You know it is a plain wagon-road of one or several wagon tracks, very different from the buffalo-trails and the travois-trails of the Indians.

"It is a wagon-road across the continent, and there is only one other trail like it, the Santa Fé Trail."

"How far are we from it?" asked Ben, who also had a feeling that Sam might be as badly lost as he and Dick had been.

"Somewhere between twenty-five and fifty miles north of it," Sam estimated.

"Then why don't we go straight south," Dick wondered, "till we strike it? I—I'm afraid, we'll all get lost."

"Don't worry, lads," Sam explained with a kindly smile. "I have never been in this country before, but we are not lost. Look

142 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

at this triangle I am drawing in the sand here.



“The short east side of it is our route from the North Platte to our hunting camp. The long south side is the Oregon Trail which runs along the north bank of the North Platte. The long northern side of the triangle is the route we are now following. When we come to the point where the two long sides meet, we shall strike the trail.

“If we went straight south, we should, of course, strike the trail, but we should lose time and we might fall in again with the big camp of the Crows.”

The two lads thought they understood, but Dick still had a feeling of being lost in a trackless wilderness.

“But if we went too far, we might miss the trail and the river after all,” he feared.

“No, lads, we couldn’t,” Sam assured them patiently. “The trail, you must remember follows the North Platte for two

hundred miles. And the North Platte is not a miserable little dry creek, it is a big river; which in several places, flows in a deep rocky canyon.

“We could not miss it any more than you could miss the Ohio, the Missouri or the Mississippi, if you were traveling toward either of them.

“So you can go to sleep without fear. I am sure that we shall strike our trail and our river, although I do not know just when and where.”

On the following day, they came out of the sand-hills and entered a rather dry and broken country.

One more day they went straight west without finding a wagon-trail or a large river, and Sam saw that Ben and Dick were again thinking that he was lost.

Toward noon of the fourth day, Sam and Al saw through the glass what seemed to be a line of dark pine-trees, and in the afternoon Sam told the small lads to ride ahead and act as advance scouts.

“Take the dog with you,” he told them, “and if you see Indians don’t start a fight

with them, but come back and tell us how many there are."

"Yes, I mean it," he added when the lads hesitated. "Ride ahead and make yourselves useful. Ride ahead about a quarter of a mile; Prince will see to it that the coyotes don't bite you."

"Ah, we aren't scared of coyotes," Ben spoke up, "nor of Indians either. Come on, Dick!"

However, in spite of their assumed bravado, the two lads proceeded with great caution. Every gully, every rock and small butte they approached with care, and from time to time they looked back to make sure that their big brothers were following them with the meat and the horses, for they had a feeling that Sam and Al were going to play some trick on them.

They had been teased a good deal about their elk-hunt, and had come to believe that Sam knew they would get lost, and that he had let them go just to have some fun with them.

Several times they stopped as if they were going to wait, but every time Sam motioned

to them to ride on, and this made them still more careful and suspicious.

“Dick, I bet you, they are going to fool us again or scare us,” Ben was sure. “But we’ll just fool them this time.”

They were now approaching some scattered yellow pines and red cedars, which seemed to be growing on rough rocky ground.

“Look out, Ben,” Dick cautioned, “there may be Indians hidden among the trees. We had better stop here.”

“Ah, come on,” Ben replied. “They won’t shoot us right away. Indians nearly always talk, before they begin to fight. Sam and Al will laugh at us, if we stop.”

When they had passed a few scattered cedar-bushes they came to a sudden halt, threw their horses around, raced back as fast as the horses would go, and yelled and shouted like wild Indians.

Sam and Al acted very much alarmed. They got their rifles and pistols ready and called:

“Did you see them? How many are there?”

But Ben and Dick did not answer. They

danced and pranced around and yelled at the top of their shrill voices: "Oregon Trail! Oregon Trail! We've found the Trail!"

CHAPTER XVIII

JOHN COLTER'S ADVENTURE

THE two younger lads were as happy as if they had already overcome all the dangers of the long journey, but Sam knew only too well that they had just entered upon the most dangerous part of the trail.

They still had to pass for fully two hundred and fifty miles through the country of the Crows, and into this country the Blackfeet made frequent raids for the purpose of stealing horses and taking scalps. For the Blackfeet were the Ishmaelites of the Plains, warring at all times against both red men and white men.

In fact the Blackfeet were the only tribes who may be said to have been almost continually hostile to the whites, from the time they first met the expedition of Lewis and Clark until the extermination of the buffalo compelled all the Plains tribes to make peace with the white race.

The other Plains Indians were generally not hostile as tribes, although they might be dangerous to small parties of whites, and members of the tribes might be guilty of murder and robbery. Men who were resolute and well-armed and understood Indian ways and Indian character, could travel and hunt in the Indian country with a fair degree of safety, if they were at the same time always watchful and fair in their intercourse with the Indians.

The Indians, like boys and soldiers, had a high regard for a combination of bravery, kindness, justice, and truthfulness, and men who by these characteristics had won their respect and affection could generally handle even the most savage tribes, except in times of open warfare.

This was, however, not the case with the Blackfeet. No trader, frontiersman, or fur company ever gained their loyal friendship in the stormy and lawless days of the western fur trade. Traders, trappers or travelers who fell in with a party of Blackfeet were always in danger of losing not only their property but their lives.

Many a trapper who followed the lure of the beaver to the rich fur streams of the Blackfeet lost his own scalp in addition to the hard-earned pelts of his game. No stone or rude cross marks the place where these men fell, for the wolves have scattered their bones.

If a man hunted with too small a company, or was too poorly armed, or relaxed in watchfulness, the relentless foes who waged war in winter as well as in summer, on foot and on horseback, robbed him of horses and goods and carried away his scalp as a token of victory. Only large parties of well-armed and experienced men could travel or trap in the Blackfeet country for any length of time with a fair prospect of ever coming out again.

The Indians whom the traders and trappers called Blackfeet really belonged to four distinct bands: The Blackfeet proper, or Siksika; the Piegan; the Bloods; and the Gros Ventres of the Prairie.

Of these four bands the Gros Ventres were the most relentless in their hostility to the whites. Small bands of trappers in the Gros Ventre country were never safe, but, in spite

of this well-known danger, these adventurers were always lured into courting death by the rich beaver streams of the Blackfeet country.

The Gros Ventres, or Atsina, also often called in the old journals Gros Ventres of the Prairie, were really not Blackfeet at all but were Arapahoes who lived a long time ago in Western Minnesota. In the great westward migration of Indian tribes, they became separated from their kinsmen and joined the Blackfeet on the upper Missouri, in the present state of Montana, while the rest of the tribe, known as Arapahoes found a home in the present state of Colorado on the headwaters of the Arkansas. The Gros Ventres of the Prairie, however, always retained their Arapaho language, and from time to time paid a great visit to their kinsmen farther south.

On these journeys they fought many battles with their Indian enemies as well as with white men, who happened to fall in their way.

Many were the stories of battle and death and of hairbreadth escapes that were told and retold at the camp fires and at the great

rendezvous during the days of the Oregon and the Santa Fé Trail.

One of the most marvelous of these stories is the adventure of John Colter which happened at the time when the upper Missouri country was first reached by the St. Louis fur-trader, Manuel Lisa.

Colter, with a companion named Potts, was trapping on a creek that runs into the Jefferson River, one of the three forks of the Missouri.

Early one morning, while they were visiting their traps, they were surprised by a large party of about five hundred Blackfeet. Potts was killed at once, while Colter was stripped naked and was given a chance to run for his life. He knew the Blackfeet language and told the chief that he was a very poor runner, so the chief gave him a start of about four hundred yards, and told him to save himself if he could.

The Blackfeet warriors set up a hellish yell, as Colter started for the Jefferson River, running as he had never run before. Away he raced barefooted over sharp grass and stones and the horrible spiny cactus. Three

miles he ran like a hunted antelope before he dared to look back.

When he did turn around he saw the Indians strung out far behind him, except one man, armed with a spear. He ran two miles more before he again looked back. Now the spearman was within twenty yards of him.

The Blackfoot now tried to throw his spear, but was so exhausted that he fell and broke the spear. This gave Colter fresh hopes. He rushed back, killed the Indian with the broken spear and again started for the river about a mile off.

When the nearest Indians reached their dead kinsman, they stopped a short time to wait for others to come up. This delay gave Colter time to reach the river. He plunged in, swam down-stream and dived under a mass of driftwood lodged against the head of an island.

When his pursuers reached the river, Colter had disappeared. They searched the fringes of woods, the brush and tall grass on the banks, and the willows on the island. They scanned the prairie up and down the

river, but the white man was gone, as if a spirit had carried him away.

Many times they walked over the driftwood, where Colter could see and hear them. For hours he stood there as if hidden in a big beaver house. It was impossible for them to see him, but his heart thumped fast, when the thought came to him that they would set the raft on fire, if they once suspected where he was. But the thought never occurred to them, and at dark they returned to camp a tired, crestfallen lot of Indians, outrun and outwitted by a hated white trapper.

How they explained that five hundred armed Indians had been unable to catch and kill one naked, unarmed white man, has never become known.

Colter had saved his life, but he was in a fearful plight; for at that time, the nearest white men lived at Manual Lisa's fort at the junction of the Bighorn River and the Yellowstone about two hundred miles away as the crow flies.

Few men indeed could have saved themselves under these conditions, but Colter, a

typical American soldier and hunter, did not despair.

He had been one of the privates of the great exploration of Lewis and Clark. When these explorers on their return trip reached the Mandan village near the present town of Bismarck, North Dakota, he was discharged and returned to the mountains to trap.

On this occasion he traveled alone from the forks of the Missouri to the Bighorn, passed through the present Yellowstone Park and was the first white man who saw Yellowstone Lake, the geysers, and other wonders of the Yellowstone.

He had a natural eye for the lay of land and rivers, and his years of experience had given him a knowledge of the country on a large scale. He possessed wonderful endurance and undaunted courage.

This was the man, who came out of hiding at dark, when the Blackfeet had given up finding him.

He was hungry, shivering with cold, sore-footed and absolutely naked and unarmed; but he traveled all night. For he knew that at daybreak his enemies would again return

to search for him, and if they once caught sight of him, there would be no hope of saving his life.

In the morning he came upon a buffalo, freshly killed by wolves. He threw stones and clods at the snarling beasts and kept them away from their kill long enough to tear off some meat for himself. On this meat and on the bulbs of the prairie turnip, he existed till he reached Manuel Lisa's fort at the mouth of the Bighorn, which he did in seven days.

The escape of John Colter, as far as the writer knows, has no parallel in American history, unless it be the exploit of the Sioux chief, Rain-In-The-Face, a trained Indian runner, who escaped from jail in Montana, and fled in mid-winter to his kinsmen in Canada. He traveled three hundred miles in three days and nights, without sleep and without food. But that is a story, which cannot be told in detail at this time.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DREADED BLACKFEET

It was stories of the kind told in the foregoing chapter that Sam could not banish from his mind, while the lads followed the trail which was now slowly approaching the mountains.

“Sam, whom are you dreaming of?” asked Al one day, when he and Sam had ridden in silence mile after mile. “What’s all the sadness about?”

“I’m not dreaming of anybody and I am not sad.” Sam spoke quietly. “I am doing some hard thinking and I am a little worried.”

“Tell me,” requested Al, “what is the thinking and worry all about.”

“It is mostly about those two small brothers. We are now in the country which the Shawnee chief thought most dangerous. I shall be surprised if we do not meet with some Crows, before we reach Fort Laramie,

and between the fort and South Pass, if we have some bad luck, the Blackfeet may catch us.”

Al thought they might as well stop worrying about Indians. They had not seen one for days, and as for the Blackfeet, Al did not believe that they would ever see the hair of one. Their country was several hundred miles north of the trail.

“Yes, I know all that,” Sam admitted, “but you also know that all these tribes are great roamers, and you may at any time find a war party or a horse-stealing party two hundred miles away from their own country.”

In about a week after the boys had left their hunting camp they reached Fort Laramie without having seen any Indians. The country had been dry and barren and they had lived entirely on the food they carried with them.

Here they learned what had become of Spotted Wolf and his party, and how completely Sam had succeeded with his ruse for throwing them off his trail.

“Gosh,” exclaimed Ben to Dick while the two lads roamed through every building and

corner of the fort, "Sam surely fooled them right. I always thought a white man couldn't fool an Indian, when it comes to trails and such things, but Sam did it."

From this time on Sam became an infallible hero to Ben and Dick. They did without murmur everything they were asked to do, and they felt absolutely sure that Sam would take them through.

It did not worry them that the emigrants had passed Fort Laramie a month ago. On the contrary, they were glad that even the last stragglers of the big train were gone. It would be no fun to travel with strangers. Sam and Al and the dog were just the right company. With Sam as their boss, they had no end of fun. At almost every camp, they found a place to swim and to fish, and Sam and Al seldom grew tired of their numerous questions. The only things forbidden were random shooting at animals or birds and riding ahead out of sight.

They were not worried, when Sam and Al figured out that they had averaged only a little over twenty miles a day since they left Fort Leavenworth. They didn't care

when they reached Oregon, for they had plenty of warm clothing and blankets, or if winter should set in, before they reached the Willamette. In fact they hoped that they would have to make at least one more hunting camp, because hunting and making pemmican had been even more fun than following the trail.

Sam and Al were not so well pleased and did not feel so secure as their two younger brothers. They had covered less than one third of the journey, only about six hundred and seventy miles, and the next four hundred miles to Fort Bridger in the Green River valley on the other side of the divide would be the most dangerous part of the way.

They would have to hunt for meat from time to time, for provisions seemed to be just melting away. Sam knew that a hunting-party often attracted Indian visitors, some of whom might be in a troublesome mood, for he had seen enough of life on the plains to know that white men often committed brutal outrages on the Indians, for which the Indians in turn took revenge on the next party of white men that fell into their hands.

They met a camp of about ten Crows, who were indeed not as ugly as the party of the late Spotted Wolf, but it took some strong talk on the part of Sam and a resolute display of guns and pistols to make them keep their distance.

They wanted to trade horses; they needed guns and ammunition, because they thought the Blackfeet were coming through their country; and they wanted to see what the white men had in their packs.

None of these requests Sam could grant; but he gave them some tobacco and some beads for their squaws.

The presence of a small party of boys on the trail was evidently puzzling to them, for they pointed east and asked in signs: "More white men?" apparently thinking that these four boys were traveling ahead of a larger train.

While Sam was talking with the leader of the Crows, Ben had a hard time to hold Prince from rushing in on the talk. He showed plainly that he remembered Spotted Wolf and that he thought all Indians were bad.

That evening the boys did not make camp; they did not even stop for supper. They let the horses drink, and filled their canteens at a water-hole and then they rode on eating their pemmican on horseback.

"I do not trust that bunch," said Sam. "We have too many things which they want; the farther we get away from them the better."

Both horses and boys grew tired, but Sam would not stop. When Dick fell asleep, Sam tied him to the saddle, but no camp was made till midnight; and then the horses were picketed as close to camp as possible. Moreover, the camp was made not adjoining the trail, but a quarter of a mile away, where it was not in sight from the trail.

If the party had been larger, Sam would have set regular night watches, but as it was, the dog, Prince, was alone left on guard duty, and the boys felt that he would allow no Indians to come close to the camp.

The night passed quietly, but in the days following, they met other parties, with whom they had a similar experience. The Indians wanted to buy guns and ammunition. Bad

Indians were coming through their country, and they needed more guns and good horses.

When the boys reached the well-known landmark, called Independence Rock, on the Sweetwater River, they all felt tired out and decided to rest for a few days.

Carved on Independence Rock they found the names of many famous explorers and trappers. And quite a number of emigrants, who had passed the rock about a month ago, had added their names to the list.

This landmark is a bare rock standing alone as if dropped on the plain, where it may be seen to this day. It lies close to the left bank of the Sweetwater. The trail left the North Platte about thirty miles east of the rock, and followed the Sweetwater. The river is said to have received its name from the fact that in the early days a mule lost a pack of sugar in its waters.

After the boys had recovered from their fatigue, Al and Dick rode ahead a few miles to get a deer or an elk, because they all craved for fresh meat.

"I wish we had some good bows and arrows," remarked Sam, as the two hunters

left camp. "I am always afraid that shooting will bring us troublesome visitors."

In the middle of the afternoon Al killed a black-tail deer, and both hunters were busy dressing their game, when they were suddenly surrounded by Indians, who motioned them to come along.

The boys had carelessly leaned their guns against a neighboring tree, and could do nothing else but obey their captors.

The Indians took them westward several miles, where they joined a large party of several hundred Indians, who were traveling north.

Al had a chance to say to Dick, "Brother, I think we are in for real trouble. I believe they are Blackfeet, though it beats me where they all come from. Whatever happens don't show any fear, it would only make matters worse. Perhaps we can slip away after dark."

There was a great noise amongst the Indians, when the captives were brought in. The chief and a number of old warriors held a council, evidently discussing the question what should be done with the white boys.

While the chief and the old men were talking, Al took a piece of curved steel out of his pocket, and began to lift his knife with it. This interested and puzzled his captors very much, for none of them had ever seen a magnet.

Al had to try the strange medicine on their own knives, but they would not touch the magnet themselves. When by touching, smelling and tasting their knives, after the white boy's medicine had lifted them, they could discover no change in them, they were still more mystified, and took the boys to the chief for whom Al had to display his medicine again.

If they had intended to kill their captives, they changed their minds, evidently thinking it too dangerous to harm men who possessed such strange medicine. Their horses and guns and pistols had been taken from the boys when they were captured, and the Indians now also took their knives, but no Indian would touch the magnet.

When evening came the Indians pitched about a hundred tepees some five miles north

of the trail, at a place where they had apparently camped before.

But Al and Dick were not allowed to enter this camp. Their captors took them several miles farther north and camped with them on a little stream in the open. Before the boys were allowed to lie down they had to take off their shoes, and their hands and feet were tied with rawhide thongs.

CHAPTER XX

AFTER THE LOST HUNTERS

WHEN evening drew near and the two hunters had not returned to camp, Sam did not at first suspect that anything serious had happened to them. The two brothers had repeatedly been away from camp together. Al had quickly learned to be cautious in the Indian country and had ridden horseback and used firearms since he had been a small boy. No Indians and buffaloes had been seen for several days, and Sam knew only too well by how many incidents a hunter may be led far from camp or may be compelled to return late by many other causes, which even the best plainsman and hunter cannot foresee.

But when the sun set and the two brothers in camp had finished their supper and picketed their horses for the night, Sam began to share the anxiety of his smaller brother.

He scanned the western skyline with his glass, but could not discover a sign of life set off above the horizon. He listened for the tramp of horses but caught no sounds except the yaps and howls of coyotes and wolves.

“Let us ride out to meet them,” he finally decided. “Perhaps they are bringing more meat than they can carry.”

At every turn and on every rise of the trail, he and Ben stopped and strained their senses to catch a sign of the returning hunters, but they caught no sign or sound of any human beings.

“Perhaps they went too far from the trail and got lost,” suggested Ben.

“No, Al couldn’t get lost here, if he tried to,” objected Sam. “On a clear night like this, any child can tell by the stars whether he is going north or south. The trail runs east and west and is so plain that a blind man could not miss it. They are not lost, something else detains them.”

Ben thought they ought to fire a gun, as they had done in the sand-hills, but Sam would not hear of that.

"If they are helpless somewhere they will fire a gun, but if they are held by Indians, our signal guns would only bring the Indians upon us, too. No, we must not do any shooting. We will go on a mile or two farther."

On the plains and in the woods, the senses of men become keen. The ears are not dulled by the clang and clatter of street traffic, and the delicate nerves of scent are not deadened by fumes of furnaces and the gross odors of the street.

"Don't you smell smoke?" asked Ben as he sniffed the breeze that was gently blowing from the northwest.

Sam was soon satisfied that Ben was right. In fact Sam smelled more than just smoke. There came across the prairie, the peculiar odor of an Indian camp.

"Let us turn toward it," he almost whispered. "If it is a camp, it is not far away." After going about two miles, they halted among some tall sage-brush, where they could look into the valley of a small stream.

And there below them was spread out a large Indian camp. It seemed as if it might contain a hundred lodges, but there was

something unreal, almost uncanny about it. The ordinary Indian camp shows many camp fires and sends forth a bedlam of noises until late at night. But in this camp the fires had all been put out. The horses were grazing in a close bunch, directly north of the camp; and Sam at once concluded that a guard was keeping them bunched. There was no beating of drums, no singing, no barking of dogs; the camp was dark and silent.

Sam knew that Indians encamped in their own country, safe from enemies, never make a silent camp. Some one is always making a feast, the drums beat for a dance, perhaps for a scalp-dance, or some squaws mourn their slain relatives with loud moans and wails.

"Stay here a little while with the horses," whispered Sam, "while I crawl up a little closer."

"No, don't, Sam," pleaded Ben. "I'm afraid to stay back alone. Let me go with you. We can take the horses into the hollow behind us and tie them to the brush."

Like wolves of the night, the two brothers began to circle around the whole camp.

"Don't you let out a yell, if you step on a cactus!" Sam warned the smaller boy.

Now a dog barked, but the short yelp that followed told Sam that some one had kicked the restless cur into silence.

On the north side of the camp the scouts crept up close enough to make sure that the ponies were indeed held together by a mounted horse guard of several men, who silently rode around the grazing herd like so many specters wrapped in their blankets, for the starlit night had turned cool.

Once the two scouts lay down flat under the sage-brush, while a mounted specter rode slowly past in the open within thirty yards of them and Ben thought the Indian would hear the beat of his heart.

"Why didn't you keep farther out?" whispered Ben, when the danger was past. "They'll—they'll catch us, if you go so close."

"Keep still," replied Sam; "I'll tell you later. Stick close to me now. We must get back to our horses."

Soon they were safe out of hearing of the

camp, but Ben was still trembling with excitement.

“Sam, why did you go so close?” he asked again. “That horse guard pretty nearly caught us.”

Sam could not help chuckling a little bit. “If we had not gone so close, I’m afraid he would have caught us. I did not want his pony to get the wind of us, that’s the reason, I hid between him and the herd. It was a bit of a close shave, and I’m glad we are out of it.”

“I’ll never,—never let you crawl around,—a,—an Indian camp alone,” Ben vowed. “If they catch you,—they,—they might as well catch me, too.”

They reached their horses and rode back to the trail as quietly as possible. Both hoped that they might find Dick and Al in camp, but Sam had now fallen into a serious mood.

The meaning of the dark and silent camp became clear to him. These Indians were not Crows, in their own country. They were enemies of the Crows, who were headed

north. They were not simply a small quick-traveling war party. They had women and children and old men with them, otherwise they would not need so many horses. They had made a silent camp so as not to attract the attention of the Crows. But who were they? Where did they come from? Where were they going? Could they be Shoshones, or Snakes, come to hunt buffalo this side of the divide?

He tried hard to recall every fact he had learned while with the traders, about the country of the various tribes and their relations. He ran over in his mind the big powerful tribes, the Sioux, the Comanches, the Cheyennes, the Shoshones, the Blackfeet, the Chippewas.

But no, the Chippewas did not belong here at all. They were Woods Indians of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

And then he tried to recall the host of small and split and scattered tribes. Some of them had been pushed west all the way from the Atlantic coast, others had been reduced to mere remnants by war or smallpox. He wished now that he had tried to learn all

about all the tribes instead of just listening to the stories of the hunters and trappers.

He knew the Delawares and Shawnees, the Otos and Missouris, the Kaws and Pawnees; but on the western tribes, the Nez Percés, the Flatheads, the Cayuses and Kootenais, he felt somewhat mixed.

What was that he had heard about the Arapahoes? Yes, that was it. They had split a long time ago and some of them had become Blackfeet. At least they were living with the Blackfeet, and ever so often they went south on a great visiting trip to their kinsmen, who lived at the headwaters of the Arkansas.

These Arapaho Blackfeet were the most dreaded enemies of all white trappers.

And suddenly a thought flashed through his mind. That big silent camp he and Ben had found, was a camp of Arapaho Blackfeet, called Gros Ventres, "Big Bellies," by the trappers. They were returning from one of their visits, and they had made a dark and silent camp because they were now traveling through the country of the Crows, their permanent enemies.

What if Al and Dick had fallen into the hands of these Gros Ventres? But no, it was not at all likely, his two cousins were undoubtedly safe in camp now.

"Let us hurry, Ben," he finally broke the silence. "Al and Dick must be home by this time. Let's hurry! They will get worried and start to look for us."

Prince was beside himself with joy, when the two boys returned. He whined and danced, rolled on the ground, bit at tufts of grass, jumped up to lick Ben's face and even gave vent to several loud barks, something which he very seldom did.

The man who does not believe in unselfish friendship has never known a dog. If he is once your friend, he does not care what clothes you wear, what office you hold, or what kind of a house you live in. If he has you he is as happy in a bark shack as in a marble palace. Your voice is music to him and your kind words are his joy.

During the night, only the younger boy really slept, for nature has decreed that childhood shall be free from sorrow while the stars are shining overhead.

Sam, on the other hand, was able to sleep only in snatches. Again and again he awoke, although weary in mind and body, and listened for the tramp of horses and the sound of human voices; and at daybreak, he and Ben and the dog started on the trail of the lost hunters.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BUCKSKIN MESSAGE

THE two lads did not look back to see the morning sunlight flood the plain and cast long shadows of rocks and hills. Their hearts were too full of anxiety to feel the joy of morning.

Now that Sam's mind was not dulled by fatigue, their calamity appeared even greater than during the wakeful hours of night.

What if they should find both of their companions dead? He had heard of many cases, where the Blackfeet had killed white men who had fallen into their hands. Most of these cases had happened some years ago, but the Blackfeet were still much the same savage warriors that they were in the days of John Colter.

So the two worried lads hurried their animals along as fast as possible, while all the time they were searching the prairie and the hills for a sign of the lost hunters, and

were urging their faithful dog to "Hunt for lost!" a command the two small boys had taught him in the woods at Leavenworth.

Prince had been as restless during the night as Sam, and he showed clearly by his active hunt for a scented trail that he understood that his masters were searching for their lost companions.

In a bit of broken country a little way south of the trail and some three miles west of Independence Rock, the dog gave tongue. Upon quickly riding to the spot, the boys found that the dog had discovered two kinds of scent at the fresh remains of an elk. At some of the tracks he growled and bristled while at others he danced and whined, looking at the boys in a quizzical way as if he would ask, "Shall I follow these? This is their trail."

"Go on! go on!" Sam urged him, and at the same time he picked up something from the ground.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "They weren't killed. Look! Here's Dick's hunting-knife!"

For half a mile the dog ran along swiftly,

his nose on the ground. Then he stopped and began to circle around much puzzled, as if the scented trail had suddenly ended. Larger and larger became the circles he made to pick up again the lost scent, but at last he came back, his tongue lolling out of his mouth, and he looked at his masters, as if he would say: "I don't understand it, but the trail stops right here. If there were trees here, I could find the one they're hiding in. Can't you tell where they have gone?"

"Good dog, good dog!" Sam patted his head. "Now we'll do a little trailing ourselves. See here, Ben, look sharp for horse tracks. Isn't this the mark of Al's horse? Sure, here is the nicked hoof of the right fore-foot."

A careful search showed that two horses and several ponies had passed over the hard ground going northwest in the direction of the Indian camp.

"Brother, I have it," called Sam. "Our hunters were surprised when they were cutting up the elk meat. Some Indians, probably the flank scouts of the big camp, heard them shoot, crawled up on them, before the

boys could grab their guns and order them to stop.

“Al kept his head, when he saw that the game was up. If he had started a fight, both he and Dick would have been killed, for one man and a small boy can’t fight half a dozen reds, if they have closed up on them.

“From the elk’s carcass to this place, Al and Dick were made to walk, and Prince followed their tracks. Then the Indians grew afraid that more white men were near, and they made the boys mount their horses again to get away quicker. Of course their guns and pistols they had taken away, and in this way they took the boys to the big camp.

“I wish to God we had listened to the old Shawnee’s warning and taken along a bow and arrows, so we could have hunted without making a lot of noise!”

However, it was not Sam’s nature to waste time on regrets. A boy of those days growing up in the new country west of the Alleghanies learned to deal with many problems of a frontier country.

“What next? What now?” were the thoughts on Sam’s mind.

He and Ben must do everything possible to learn more about their lost companions. In order to do so, they must travel light, much lighter than they had gone thus far. So they rode back to the elk's carcass, where they had tied up the pack-horses and extra horses. During the work before them, they could not be encumbered with anything.

"We'll cache the goods," decided Sam, "and hobble the horses right here. This place is as good as any we would be likely to find. If we ever come back this way, we may recover our horses and goods, if not, some Indians will make a great find."

In a very short time, the two brothers were once more on the trail of the Blackfeet. They carried nothing but their arms and ammunition, a few blankets and a little dried meat, cracked hominy, sugar and tea. The brindled Dane came with them, but they had taken no extra saddle-horses, fearing that such might hinder more than help.

They were soon in sight of the Indian camping-ground of the previous night; but the Indians were gone, which showed that they were in a hurry to get out of the country.

Neither the dog nor the boys could find anything else but the usual relics of an Indian camp, so they followed the trail cautiously northward a short distance. This was easy enough, for the travois and ponies of several hundred Indians made a trail plain enough. In fact Sam was not afraid of losing the trail, he was afraid of being caught by some of the scouts, whom the Blackfeet had undoubtedly left in the rear, to give warning of any pursuing war parties of their enemies, the Crows.

Not until the afternoon did the two lads proceed on the trail with the greatest care, keeping under cover as much as possible, although they felt reasonably sure that by this time even the rear scouts were far enough ahead that they were not likely to discover the two horsemen following.

Sam was too well versed in the ways of the Indians to attempt at the present time a rescue of the lost hunters. He did not even wish to fall in with any of the Blackfeet scouts.

"We don't want them to capture us," he explained to his puzzled young brother.

“And we can not afford a brush with them. If one of them should be wounded or killed by us, they would take revenge on our friends. That is the Indian way. If a white man kills a Blackfoot, the Blackfeet will kill the next white man, who falls into their hands. It would never occur to them to ask who was to blame or who started the trouble. Even if a wise old chief saw the foolishness of the ancient custom, he would not be able to control his young warriors. Whatever we do, we must, at present, not get into a fight with the Blackfeet.”

“Then why are we following them?” asked Ben.

“To see what we can find out. Their next camp may tell us something. Or perhaps Al may outwit them in some manner and get away with Dick. Al can be depended upon to make the most of any chance.”

However, the next camping-place told nothing to the eyes of the boys and very little to the nose of the dog, who showed his usual anger at the many Indian smells. But on the site of one tepee he became much excited. He sniffed the ground intently and ran

around trying to pick up a trail, but the scent ended right there.

Both lads gave a shout of joy. "They're still alive!" they cried. "Prince has found the place where they camped last night."

For several days they followed the trail, keeping half a day behind the Indians. In this way they learned that the Blackfeet were moving rapidly northward along the foothills in the valley of the Big Horn with the evident intention of reaching the region of the Three Forks of the Missouri and the mouth of the Marias, which was Blackfeet country.

Every camp they searched carefully for signs or a possible message, but they discovered nothing more definite until they reached the fifth camp. At this place the dog discovered a small piece of buckskin, which at first sight looked like a rag accidentally left among pieces of wood on the camping-ground. But a close examination showed it to carry a most important message. Something was crudely printed on it with charcoal:

"Caught by Blackfeet. Winter Jeff Fork.

Shall watch our chance. Do not follow us. AL."

While this note confirmed the fears of Sam, it left no doubt whatever that the two lost boys were still alive; and it gave the all-important information as to the place where these Blackfeet intended to spend the winter.

This question had been in Sam's mind every day they had been following the trail. He knew that the Plains Indians were great roamers. Many times he asked himself: "Where and how far are they going?"

If they continued to go north into Canada they would be five hundred miles from the Oregon Trail, and it would be next to impossible to bring help to his friends.

The words "Jeff Fork" plainly meant "Jefferson Fork of the Missouri," which was only about a hundred and fifty miles straight north of Fort Hall. The question of bringing any help to Al and Dick was still a truly desperate one, but at this distance with Fort Hall as a base, he might at least make some attempt.

He could not hope to secure any more information at present, for it would be im-

possible for the captives to leave a fuller message written on paper and placed on a stick, the kind of message Ben had expected to find. Sam felt sure that Al had no pencil or paper on his person, when he left camp at Independence Rock. Moreover, the Blackfeet undoubtedly watched their captives so closely that it would have been impossible openly to leave a message in the camp or on the trail. But Al had at last outwitted them by tearing a piece of buckskin from his shirt and printing the message on it in the dark. At least, this was the conclusion Sam and Ben reached after they had again and again examined the message. The letters were unequal in size, the lines were crooked, and the letters overlapped as in a monogram. The

A photograph of a piece of buckskin with a handwritten message. The message consists of the letters 'FF' followed by 'FOR'. The 'FF' is written in a stylized, overlapping manner, with the second 'F' partially covering the first. The 'FOR' is written in a more standard, though still somewhat irregular, hand. The ink is dark and the background is a light, textured material.

words especially gave them much trouble to decipher.

In the afternoon of this day, Sam discovered through his glass two Indian scouts about two miles to the west also following the Blackfeet trail; and in the evening the prairie to the north was on fire for miles, the fire running south with a north wind.

Sam concluded that the scouts he had seen were Crows. The Blackfeet, he believed, had discovered them and had set fire to the grass to prevent any large war party of Crows following them.

Under these conditions Sam deemed it wise to return and, if possible, to recover their cache and horses; and in order to avoid both the fire and the Crow scouts, he made a detour of several miles to the east.

CHAPTER XXII

A ROBBED CACHE

SAM was unusually silent on the return to the cache.

Would he ever see again the two lads for whose safety he had made himself responsible? He should never have allowed them to go out hunting in a country where he knew they might fall in with roaming Blackfeet. He should have gone himself.

Was he not acting the coward now, in not going amongst the Blackfeet and sharing the fate of Al and Dick, whatever that might be? He had a hard struggle with himself, for it was just what he wanted to do. What possible help could he expect at Fort Bridger or Fort Hall? He could not ask strangers to expose themselves to almost certain death or even torture amongst these savages just because he had mismanaged his party.

After all, it was a foolhardy thing for four lads to face the dangers of traveling through

the country of half a dozen Indian tribes whose distrust of the white race was being fanned into hatred and fear lest this dangerous race should kill all the buffalo and starve every Indian on the plains.

The old Shawnee had given him true warning. He should have waited till next spring to join the big emigrant train to Oregon. What would his parents think of his foolishness? And Al's and Dick's parents would curse him for the loss of their sons. Unless he could find some way to rescue his friends from the Blackfeet, he could never show his face in Oregon. He might as well live with the Indians like many white men, who had given up the thought of ever returning to their own people.

For several days Sam tortured himself with these thoughts. That Al, who was old enough to think and whom he had cautioned many times against the carelessness of inexperienced travelers, had in any way been seriously at fault never occurred to him.

It was only after he had almost exhausted himself with reproaches that youth and a naturally buoyant temperament asserted

themselves. His sleep became again deep and unbroken, and he became more alert and watchful than ever.

To his younger brother he became again cheering and talkative and was careful not to overtax the lad's strength. Every evening the two had a meal of pemmican or fresh meat secured on the way and made cheerful by a liberal potion of sweet hot tea; for Sam knew that it is only the cheerful man who can endure hardships and face danger undaunted and find a way out. This he meant to do.

But no sooner was the meat cooked or the tea made, than the small fire was put out, and as soon as darkness had fallen on the mountains and the plains the two lone travelers again mounted their horses, and later spread their blankets in some secluded spot, a mile or two from the place, where a thin wreath of smoke might have betrayed their presence to the keen eyes of some roving Indian hunters or war party.

When the two arrived at their cache late one evening, the place looked as if a prairie whirlwind had struck it. Every pack had

been torn open. The bolt of red calico was trailed over an acre of ground, one of the sugar sacks was torn to pieces, and of the supply of bacon, biscuits and dried meat and pemmican not a mouthful was left, except one pack hid in a crevice in the rocks.

For a moment Sam stood speechless. Then he said something in Shawnee accompanied by some quick vigorous motions in the sign language, and he ended by laughing out loud and exclaiming:

“Well, if an old grizzly bear didn’t have a family picnic on our grub! Old Satan himself couldn’t have made the place look worse!

“Go, Ben, and get some sagebrush and grease-wood for our fire. Gone is most of the bacon and jerked buffalo! We’ll have some broiled antelope steak for supper.”

“Sam, what did you say in Indian?” asked Ben.

“Oh, I just sent that grizzly a friendly greeting,” Sam replied, laughing, “and thanked him for not eating the calico and the tobacco, so we have something left to give to the Indians.

“If he hasn’t gone and killed every one of

our horses, we ought to give him a medal for good behavior.”

When the next day they searched for the hobbled horses, it looked for a while as if the grizzly had indeed forfeited all claims to a medal. Near a clump of tall sage-brush in a dry run within half a mile of the cache lay the bones of one of the horses. They identified the animal as one of their own by the hobble rope which was still securely tied to one of the forefeet.

“I was afraid of it,” Sam remarked downheartedly. “I fear the grizzlies got them all. A free horse can take care of himself anywhere, but with a hobble on, he is badly handicapped. It’s hard luck, Ben. I guess we shall have to foot it most of the way to Fort Hall. Our two horses are nearly worn out with hard travel and scant fare. Traveling all day and being staked down in the sage-brush at night has made a hard life for the poor beasts.”

In his expectation of finding the other five horses dead somewhere near the cache, the lads were pleasantly disappointed. They were gone. The boys climbed a rock, and

with a glass searched the valley of the Sweet-water both east and west.

The plain of this river both east and west of Independence Rock was a rich game country, and the boys soon discovered antelope, elk, and buffalo, but no horses.

"I have no doubt," Sam spoke gloomily, "they are lying dead in the sage-brush somewhere. This is a hard country for a horse that can not make free use of his legs and hoofs."

"Couldn't we have let them run free?" asked Ben.

"No, sonny, not in this country. We might have done so on an island in the Platte, but on the plain here, they would have traveled a hundred miles by themselves or joined a band of wild horses. No, if we had let them go unhobbled, we should never have seen one of them again.

"But even now, the question is: if they are not dead, where are they?"

Few city boys pay close attention to wind and weather, but Sam and Ben like all good plainsmen and woodsmen had learned to take close note of earth and sky.

They remembered that the wind had been mostly west and northwest for the past week. The weather had been quite warm and they reasoned that the horses, if alive, had most likely traveled up-stream against the wind. The season had been rather dry and most of the small tributaries of the Sweetwater were dry. It was therefore not likely that they had strayed far from the river.

Acting on these points, the lads made a careful search up-stream, one of them riding most of the time on the north side and the other on the south side of the river.

And the longer they searched, the more Ben's courage and spirits fell.

"Sam might as well have told me he lost a penny on the Sweetwater last year and asked me now to hunt for it. There aren't any horses in this country. I'm sure the grizzly bear and the wolves got ours. It's no use looking for them." Such were the thoughts of Ben as he rounded point after point without seeing horses or fresh sign of horses.

When the two brothers met at noon Ben told Sam that he thought it was no use look-

ing for the horses any longer. He felt sure they were all dead.

But Sam smiled in a friendly way at the discouragement of his young brother.

“You let the blues catch you, brother, while you were traveling alone. This afternoon you come with me. We can ride up on the south side and return on the north side. Now, I will tell you something which you failed to notice.

“If all our horses had been killed near the cache, we should have seen some ravens and crows in the neighborhood. And I can tell you a little more. I found some sign, which was not more than three or four days old and I found a place, where two horses had been lying down. There was no sign of an Indian camp near that place, and the animals were not wild horses, because those generally travel in bands of about ten or twenty or more. I think those signs and beds were made by our own horses, that have slowly traveled against the wind, just as we figured; and I think we had better put in the rest of the day looking for them.”

But when several hours had again passed

without the lost horses being found, Ben was once more ready to give up the search.

“Let us return to the cache,” he urged, “and take what we want. The grizzlies or the Indians got our horses, or they broke their hobbles and strayed away. We have not seen a sign of them all afternoon.”

“If we do not find the horses, we do not need to return to the cache,” Sam told the impatient boy. “Our present mounts are carrying their full loads now. In fact I can see that they are going to give out, unless we let them rest several days. They are half-starved and are getting footsore.

“Remember, brother, Fort Hall is four hundred miles off, and we shall have to walk part of the way, unless we find our extra horses.”

And again the two lads rode westward mile after mile, carefully searching every spot, where a bunch of horses might graze. Ben paid but little attention to anything. The barks and antics of the prairie-dogs did not seem funny to him, and the big wild game had no interest for him. He was tired and worn out, as tired as the faithful horse that car-

ried him. When riders and horses stopped for a drink at a cool spring, he was strongly tempted to ask Sam to camp for the night, but he knew how Sam always stuck to a plan once decided on. So he said nothing and followed Sam's lead, but he could not help thinking how fine it would be if he could just lie down under the willow near the spring and sleep till daylight, and then sleep some more till noon.

The sun was already throwing a flood of gold over the autumn grasses and flowers and over the shining band of the river, when the riders turned a projecting cliff.

When the plain beyond was again in view, both of the horses, that had been listless and weary all day, raised their heads and uttered a loud, glad whinny.

Three horses, only a hundred yards away returned the greeting of their kind, and a fourth arose quickly from the shade of a straggling cottonwood.

The two lads gave a shout, for they had found four of the strayed animals; and King Saul in the Good Book was not more glad, when he found the lost asses of his father.

At a spring near by, the lads made camp and ate a frugal supper, while six horses were cropping the rich green grass on a little meadow near the river.

Before the stars came out, two weary lads were sound asleep in their blankets under the willows, and their faithful watch-dog lay stretched out on a saddle-blanket.

CHAPTER XXIII

TO FORT HALL AND PIERRE'S HOLE

WHAT became of the sixth horse, the boys never learned. He was a restless animal, and Sam thought he might have broken his hobble and joined a band of wild animals. Be that as it may, when in the morning he was not found near the other horses, the boys decided to lose no time searching for him, but to return directly to their cache.

They passed only one night at that place, starting on the long trail for Fort Hall next morning.

Sam and Ben each rode one of the fresh horses, while the two others carried the goods and extra equipment which the bears had not destroyed. Fortunately, Sam had hidden a small cask of powder under some rocks, where it had not been disturbed. The two horses that had carried Sam and Ben on the trail of the Blackfeet followed without a load.

Game was still abundant along the Sweet-

water, but the buffaloes were no longer as numerous as the trappers had found them ten years earlier. The prairie was everywhere dotted with their bleached bones and skulls, showing the destruction wrought on the great herds by white and Indian skin-hunters.

When the travelers came within sight of the mountains, they saw that the higher peaks and ranges were already white with large and small fields of snow. The Shining Mountains thus gave warning to the travelers of the near approach of winter.

For their food the boys depended now entirely on game, and Ben was afraid that like some travelers he had heard of, they might have to eat some of their horses. But Sam laughed at the fears of his smaller brother.

"Any two fellows with good guns and plenty of ammunition," he said, "that can not kill enough game in this country should have stayed with their mothers. It might be difficult to find game to feed twenty or thirty men, but two of us should have no trouble, if we use our heads and do not waste the meat we secure."

They reached the low divide of the famous South Pass without accident, and camped at the Pacific Springs a week after they had left their cache.

On the grand scenery around them they bestowed but little thought. Nor did they allow themselves to be detained by the dust storms of the dry and barren trail. Their one thought was: "Travel, travel," to reach Fort Hall as soon as possible, so that they might make some definite plan of rescuing Al and Dick, if it were at all possible to devise such a plan.

About half-way between Independence Rock and Fort Hall one of the famous mountaineers of those days, Jim Bridger, had established a trading-post or fort in the summer of 1843.

The lads stopped several days at Fort Bridger, located on Black's Fork, a tributary of Green River; and Sam secured much valuable information from the famous pioneer, who knew the mountains, the trails, the rivers and the Indians for hundreds of miles around his fort far better than most men and boys know their own township.

Bridger told the boys that a party of American trappers under the leadership of one Rufus Stone had gone north into the mountains from Fort Hall and that they expected to winter in a secluded valley or park called Pierre's Hole, a name by which it is known to this day.

On leaving Fort Bridger the lads relaxed a little in the caution with which they had traveled east of South Pass; for they were now in the country of the Shoshones or Snake Indians, who had been friendly to the whites, ever since the days of Lewis and Clark, whose guide, the faithful Sacajawea, was a Shoshone woman.

But the lads did not forget they were traveling in a country to which the arm of the law did not reach, and where even friendly Indians might yield to the temptation of stealing a white man's horse and goods.

A day's journey west of Fort Bridger a band of some thirty Shoshones discovered the two lads. Sam at first noticed a small cloud of dust in the distance, and when the Indians had approached within a mile of the

white men, they fired several guns, which gave Ben a great fright. But Sam, being better acquainted with Indian ways, knew that this was meant as a friendly salute.

"They wouldn't shoot in the air, if they were hostile," he explained to Ben, who thought that now the time had come for their last fight.

But although Sam felt convinced of the friendly disposition of the Shoshones, he nevertheless signaled them not to approach, and the younger brother was again surprised, when the whole band obeyed the signal.

The chief of the band now dismounted, laid his gun on the ground and came forward alone. Sam also dismounted and gave his gun and horse to Ben, saying:

"Don't be scared, brother, but look out for that dog of yours."

Prince, indeed, was ready to welcome the Shoshone in the same way he had greeted the Crow on the Platte, and Ben tied him to the saddle just in time to prevent his making a vicious rush at the friendly chief.

The Indian told Sam that their camp was about ten miles up the Big Muddy river and

invited the lads to stay with them over night. He wanted to know where Sam's chief was and how far the other white men were behind on the Big Trail.

At first the Indians would not believe that Sam and Ben had no chief and that no other white men were following them. Several scouts were sent east to look for other white men, but they soon returned and satisfied their chief that the white boys had told the truth.

Arrived at the camp, the white guests were given the seat of honor in the chief's tepee, the place opposite the door between the fire place and the rear wall. A squaw brought them a meal of broiled trout, caught in a stream near by, and some young men placed the goods of the boys in the chief's tent and then took care of the horses. Prince had to be tied up in the tepee, for he showed a strong desire to kill every Indian dog that came near him.

In the morning Sam made a present of some tobacco, some red cloth and some beads to the chief, and the Indian sent three men and a boy with his white friends to see them

safely to Fort Hall. He also advised them to remain at Fort Hall over winter and to go on a buffalo hunt with his men, who were preparing to make their great fall hunt.

Fort Hall was a Hudson Bay Company's post. It was built in 1834 by an American from Boston, John Weyeth, who tried to establish himself in the fur trade in the mountains, but he found the Hudson Bay Company too strong and was compelled to sell his fort and goods and furs to his powerful British rival.

In 1843, the year of our story, the fort was in charge of James Grant, who was most courteous and friendly to the lads, furnishing them with everything needed at a reasonable cost.

The Hudson Bay Company was always hospitable and helpful to missionaries, explorers, and travelers, provided they did not try to engage in the fur trade. The Company was ever watchful against rivals.

The lads had not told the Indians of the misfortune they had suffered, but they did tell the whole story to Mr. Grant and asked for his advice.

Mr. Grant set at rest the troubled conscience of Sam.

“It would have been foolhardy,” he told the boys, “if you had entered the Blackfeet camp. It would have made all four of you captives; and several years might have passed, before your people would have been able to learn what had become of you.”

The report about Rufus Stone and his party of some twenty free trappers was confirmed by Mr. Grant.

The free trappers of those days were men who had not hired out to trap for either the American Fur Company or the Hudson Bay Company. They trapped for themselves and depended entirely on themselves in the protection of their lives and property. They sold their furs at any of the western trading-posts, or at a rendezvous of traders and trappers, or took them directly to St. Louis.

They generally bought enough Indian goods, and supplies in St. Louis to stay about two years in the mountains. Once in the beaver country, they trapped on every rich stream, but also bartered for many valuable furs with the Indians.

The best of these free trappers, men like Kit Carson, James Bridger, William T. Hamilton, Bill Williams, and others less famous were brave and fearless American pioneers, men of fine character and of a kindly disposition. Whenever possible, they established friendly relations with the Indians, amongst whom they had many devoted friends. But when a hostile tribe or band tried to rob them of horses, goods, or furs, they fought with such vigor and bravery that their name became a terror to the red robbers.

However, when at all possible they avoided getting into fights with the natives. Trapping on a good stream was a very profitable business, but fighting was very unprofitable. After a fight, although they had been victorious, the men had to trap with gun in hand, so to speak; for they never knew, when the revengeful Indians would return to ambush the men as they attended their traps often miles away from camp. The result generally was that the trappers broke camp and left that part of the country.

Rufus Stone and his party were trapping

somewhere on the headwaters of the Clearwater and Salmon Rivers, both tributaries of the Snake. They intended to winter in Pierre's Hole, one of the hundreds of park-like valleys in the mountains. When they would arrive at their winter encampment Grant did not know. It might be any time in November or December; and they might, of course, change their plan and not come to Pierre's Hole at all.

Next spring, Mr. Grant thought they would again spend several months hunting beaver, because beaver fur is best, when the ice begins to melt in the streams and beaver ponds, and in midsummer he expected to see them at Fort Hall.

As to whether they would help or could help Sam and Ben in any way, Grant was unable to say. He felt sure they were men who knew the mountains and every mountain pass, they loved adventure and they were not afraid of the Blackfeet.

"If you do fall in with them," Grant concluded, "you will find them a savage-looking crowd. Brown as Indians, long beards, long hair, dressed in buckskin shirts and trousers.

And armed!" he exclaimed, "armed like the toughest highwaymen you could imagine! Rifles, shotguns, pistols, knives, and hatchets! And by George! They aren't bluffers! The old boys can shoot! I seen them do it!"

That evening, when Sam and Ben retired to one of the small bedrooms of the fort, Sam's mind was made up.

"Brother," he said, "they are our men. If we can only find them!"

It was now the beginning of October, and as the distance from Fort Hall was only about a hundred and fifty miles, the lads had plenty of time to reach Pierre's Hole, for it was not at all likely that the trappers would arrive at their winter quarters until about the middle of November.

Mr. Grant advised the lads to engage an Indian as guide, fearing that the lads might become lost and bewildered in the mountains.

But Sam and Ben felt that they could find the place without a guide. Jim Bridger had not only given them a clear description of the route, but had drawn a map of it, indicating all the prominent rivers, mountains and other landmarks. Sam believed that Bridger's

map was a better guide than any Indian in the country.

Jim Bridger had known the country of Pierre's Hole and the Three Forks country north of it for more than ten years. He was there in 1832 at the mountain rendezvous of the traders, trappers, and Indians. In that year he traveled about in the mountains for more than a thousand miles, and in a fight with the Blackfeet, he received in his shoulder an arrow head which he carried about for three years, until Dr. Marcus Whitman, the missionary, cut it out on Green River in 1836.

So the lads set out with nothing but Bridger's map to guide them.

They traveled up the Snake River, then turned up Henry Fork, and finally found themselves in a beautiful valley near the head of the Teton River, which is a tributary of Henry Fork. This valley they found no difficulty in recognizing as Pierre's Hole.

It ran north and south about twenty-five miles, and was from three to five miles wide. A fringe of poplars and willows, golden with their autumn colors, followed the stream, and many fringes of trees ran towards the

mountains along small, clear creeks. The grass was rich and abundant, and game was plentiful. The valley seemed to be a kind of wild paradise, far removed from all the troubles and sorrows of the human world of avarice and war.

Above the open valley of the autumn-tinted trees and shrubs, arose the great somber forests of pines and other evergreens; and far to the east the bare, snow-covered peaks of the Three Tetons, the most prominent landmarks of all the Rocky Mountains, rose into the realm of the clouds.

There was no doubt that the lads had found the trappers' Paradise which Bridger had described to them, but of the trappers themselves there was no sight or sign in the whole valley.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BRUSH FORT

ONE of the hardest games for white men and white boys to play is the game of waiting. We have ever been an impatient race.

In this respect the Indians are different, perhaps they are our superiors. An Indian knows how to wait. It comes natural to him and it is not a trial for him. Perhaps he has learned the game during many generations of hunting and stalking the game of the forest and the plains.

During many, many centuries,—no one knows how many,—the red man had to wrest his food and clothing and shelter from the wilderness like a man stranded on a wild, uninhabited island.

He had to fight stern, wild nature bare-handed. No distant markets sent him food and no factories made clothing and arms, traps and ammunition for him.

The weapons he used, he made with his own hands. He had no steel axes, saws, and planes to cut and shape a tree into lumber. Crude stone knives, axes, and hammers were all the tools he could command. What infinite patience and skill it must have taken in those days to make bows and arrows that would capture such big game as elk, moose, and buffalo!

I have often wondered how the hard-working Indian women in those days cut their lodge-poles and their firewood, and how the men cut the birch-bark for their canoes and the logs for their dug-outs. One may search the old journals and records for stories of this kind, but he will find very little.

Most of the white men, who knew the Indians in those early days, have left no records. The Jesuit Fathers had perhaps the best opportunities of seeing the Indian as he lived before white traders sold him guns, axes, knives, needles, traps, and blankets, iron and copper kettles and many other things, which he quickly learned to use. But the good fathers were much more interested in saving the souls of the Indians and in driving Satan

and his cohorts out of the woods, than they were in learning how a man can live in the wilderness, when he has only his bare hands and his wits to depend on.

One other great help in making a living the Indians did not possess. They had no domestic animals; no cattle, hogs, sheep, goats, or horses.

When Columbus discovered the New World there was not a horse in all of North and South America. The Indian ponies of our plains in later days came from horses which the Spanish explorers and settlers abandoned or lost in the regions, which now embrace the Southwest of the United States. As these strange animals became numerous and spread northward the Indians of the plains became horsemen, quickly recognizing the value of the new beast, both for war and for hunting.

To this day the Blackfoot word for horse is *ponokameta*, a compound of the words for elk and dog, and means elk-dog. The Blackfeet did not have horses until about 1700, and they had to coin a new word for the new animal.

The Indian tribes did have dogs and did

know the use of fire, but it must have troubled the Indian mothers not a little to feed the hungry hunters and children when the ever-boiling kettle in front of the tepee was unknown.

It must have been in those days when the Indian hunters practiced patience to such an extent that it became a part of his nature. He had to approach close to his game, for an arrow would not kill at long range, and a lost arrow meant a day's work to replace it.

Fortunate it was for the two boys in Pierre's Hole that they did not simply have to sit down and wait for the trappers to arrive from somewhere in the wild, unknown mountains. Whether the trappers made this place their winter quarters or not, the boys knew that they themselves would have to camp there, at least, till midwinter. Unless—yes, unless—as Sam sometimes said to himself, when the younger boy was soundly asleep in his blankets, unless a war party of Blackfeet captured them or compelled them to flee.

Pierre's Hole was by no means safe from incursions by the Blackfeet. It was con-

nected by a pass as Bridger had told Sam, with the famous Jackson Hole country east of the divide, and all the country east and north of the divide was not only Blackfoot country, but country almost sure to be full of Blackfeet during the winter, because it was a good game country and was the southern range of these tribes.

However, the two lads had no time to worry about themselves, not even about their two friends, who, if they were still alive, must be somewhere with the Blackfeet across the divide, which wound its way among the wild, rugged mountains east and north of their camp in the beautiful valley of the Teton River.

They located their camp where a small mountain stream joined the Teton. On the north side it was sheltered by a thick growth of willows, brush and young poplars, and it was so well concealed amongst trees and small growth that one might easily pass within a quarter of a mile and not discover it.

"I think we ought to build some sort of a fort," Sam said, when the site was definitely selected and their tent was up. "Of course

a fort with only two men in it, looks a good deal like a joke, but if we have not some kind of protection any small bunch of Reds can crawl up on us and fill us full of arrows, or just say, 'Come along, boys, we've got you!' "

"Why, Sam," Ben asked laughing, "they wouldn't talk in that way, would they?"

"No, they wouldn't," Sam admitted. "But that is what their talk would mean, if they did talk.

"But they might just knock us on the head without saying a word; or they might grab us, swing their beastly tomahawks over our heads and yell like so many devils. That's most likely what they would do. I guess that's the way they caught Al and Dick. But what ruse Al put up to save their lives, I should like to know.

"When I told the story to Jim Bridger, he said he was surprised the boys were not killed at once, but he believes as I do that in some way Al managed to save his own and Dick's scalp."

The boys decided that they would build a corral for their horses, so as to make it im-

possible for any roving Indians to steal their horses at night.

“Confound all the Indians,” Sam remarked. “It makes no difference how friendly a tribe claims to be, they will all steal horses. To steal horses and mules and cattle, they seem to think is all right, if they can do it without getting caught. Well, we are not going to make it easy for them.”

Their tent, the lads also pitched in the corral, but they built an extra fence around it, so the horses could not come up to the tent. For Prince, they built a little house of brush and sod near the gate inside the corral, so as to make it impossible for any horse-thief to enter the enclosure without waking the watchful Dane.

It would have been too much labor for the two lads to build a solid breastwork of earth and heavy logs around the corral, but they did surround the whole corral about three feet high with brush. Arrows and even bullets were not likely to go through this brush, and behind it they would be able to put up some sort of defense, and it would, at least, be much more difficult to surprise them.

When the corral was finished, they cut up their tents and made a tepee out of the cloth.

"In the tepee, we can keep a fire burning, when it gets cold," Sam told Ben, "but in the tent we should just have to sit and freeze."

Every day, while they were working, Sam watched the bare peaks and ridges and the pine-covered slopes of the mountains with much interest and anxiety.

He knew if the weather continued warm and fair some Blackfeet hunters and warriors might come into the valley of the Teton to hunt and to lift some scalps if they had a chance to surprise any Shoshones, Nez Percés, or white men.

At the end of two weeks, a snowstorm, lasting several days, raged in the mountains. When the clouds disappeared, the lads saw that all the slopes above timber line, were covered with a sheet of white, except in those places, where the slope was so steep that the snow could not adhere. They had no means of knowing how much snow had fallen in the timber, but Sam felt sure that all the moun-

tain trails and passes were now closed with a deep layer of snow.

At last, he and Ben were safe, for it was not likely that any Blackfeet would now cross the divide before spring.

CHAPTER XXV

WILL THEY COME?

IF the lads had not had two great anxieties on their minds, their fancy could not have pictured a place nearer to a boy's dream of happiness than this Indian paradise in the mountains.

A clear, rapid river, marked by fringes of fine trees, wound its way, like a silvery ribbon through the brown grass of the valley. The soft grays and browns of the open slopes were relieved here and there by groves of white-barked poplars as well as by dark patches of wild plum, cherry and other shrubs. Again and again Ben felt sure that he had discovered a grove of the white canoe-birch of the Northern Indians, but a close approach always showed that nature had added a wash of soft delicate green and little patches of black to the white of these trees and that they were not birch but poplar, the

most widely distributed tree of North America.

In the matter of streams the good Lord had certainly done much better by this mountain paradise than by the Garden in the East. Instead of four rivers, there were many, dozens of them, of all sizes, running and leaping from the mountain slopes to the river, some like playful children, others like the wild colts of the prairie.

There were no lions and lambs and bare-footed children such as Ben had seen on some old pictures, but other much finer animals, the lads saw near their camp every day. Many magnificent elk had come down from the mountains in company of black-tail deer, and several small herds of buffalo could be seen daily. But small herds in those days meant herds that embraced two or three hundred animals. Herds of antelope were common, and on high rocky slopes, the bighorned sheep stood like sentinels of the mountains. Of course, the big gray wolves and the coyotes, the ever-present followers of the buffalo, filled the valley with their wild and weird hunting-song.

Of bears, both black and grizzly, the lads found many signs, but like the little gophers and prairie-dogs, these big animals had retired into their dens for the winter.

But the red-spotted and rainbow-colored trout had not gone to sleep. They filled every hole and played on every pebble bed of the mountain streams. In sheer playfulness they bit at everything that was put on a hook, and it was Ben's constant regret that there were not more people in camp to fish for. And the boys ate the delicately flavored fish with almost as much relish as they caught them. There was not even a suggestion of mud or weed in the solid pink meat. Brook trout broiled and brook trout fried was surely a treat to hungry boys, who had for months largely subsisted on pemmican and jerked buffalo.

"Never in my life," vowed Ben, "shall I touch again a Missouri River catfish or an Illinois sucker. Gosh, Sam, the fellows out there don't know what a real fish is.

"Say, Sam," he asked after a while, "why doesn't the Bible tell something about the boys of Adam and Eve fishing in the rivers

in Eden? You suppose old man Adam made them dig in the garden and pick apples all the time?"

"Ah, wake up, brother, and spend a little more time reading your Bible," Sam chided him in a friendly way. "Adam and Eve didn't have any boys, while they lived in Eden."

"I guess that's right," admitted Ben. "Are we going hunting this afternoon or are we going to fish some more?"

"I guess, we'll do neither," Sam observed. "Look at the mountains! They are surely great Shining Mountains now to the east, but to the north a snowstorm is blowing. Look, you can't see the peaks at all, and the dark pine slopes are almost buried in whirling snow clouds. I think we had better cut some wood this afternoon. Some of these days a snowstorm may come down into our valley."

It was a surprise to both lads that the horses recovered so quickly on the short, dead grass in the valley. In fact Ben had been worried about the horses, when he saw that Pierre's Hole was a big mountain valley cov-

ered with dry and dead grass. He had thought that the place was much smaller, a real hole in the mountains, where for some reason the grass remained green all winter.

"Sam, our horses will surely get pretty thin here, if they don't starve on this dead grass," he said.

But Sam was not worried. "If the trappers can winter here with their horses, and the Indians and the big game, I guess our horses can find enough to eat. This grass is not like so much dead grass in the East. It is like fine hay cured on the stem and left in the field."

"Who found this place first?" Ben wanted to know.

"I guess the wild animals, the buffaloes and the elk must have found it first. Then the Indians discovered it, and later the trappers found it. Some trappers were here and had a fight with the Blackfeet ten years ago, so I have been told."

A few days later the sky became cloudy in the afternoon. In the evening it began to snow, and when the boys woke up in the morning, the whole valley, the slopes and the moun-

tain forests were covered with a fluffy glistening layer of snow.

Again Ben was worried about the horses. How could they find grass, when the snow grew deeper, or when it formed a crust? But for the present at least the horses did very well. They pawed away the snow or pushed it aside with their muzzles; moreover after a few days of mild weather, the snow disappeared entirely from the bottom of the valley.

Thus the days passed, all full of work and exercise in the keen mountain air. Hunting and curing the meat, fishing, and exploring the trout streams, looking after the horses, repairing saddles and clothing, cutting wood and other camp work left no idle hour in the short days.

Both lads were now assured that neither they nor their horses would starve in the Teton Valley. For the horses the boys had put up a brush shed which sheltered them from wind and snow, and the animals looked as well as if they were getting their measure of oats every day.

Only one thing worried the boys now. It

was the last week in November and there was as yet no sign of the trappers in the valley. What if they had changed their plans? Bridger had told Sam that there were many warm and grassy valleys or holes in the mountains. In fact Bridger had said there were hundreds of holes, or parks like Pierre's Hole, where men and horses could winter; where the weather never was very cold for any length of time, where the grass remained good, where the snow never lay very deep, and where game was plentiful. What could the boys do, if the trappers had gone to some other place, and did not come to Pierre's Hole?

Thanksgiving came and passed. Although the camp table was set with fragrant trout and sage-hen, and Sam had baked some fine biscuits with elk suet for shortening, it was a sad and anxious day for the boys. They could not help thinking and talking much of their friends with the Blackfeet and of their parents anxiously waiting for them in Oregon. The mountain ridges, the Three Tetons, and the forest slopes were again hidden by snow clouds; some snow also fell in

the valley, and there was no sign of the trappers.

Another day passed and another, but no trappers came to Pierre's Hole.

The last of November arrived, and the campers put in the day cutting wood and carrying it to camp, for the weather looked threatening.

After dark the boys sat for a while at a camp-fire.

"It is so warm and cloudy," remarked Sam, "I look for a big snowfall over night."

The fire was burning low, and both lads looked in silence at the dying coals, for they had by this time told each other many times all they had to tell.

Prince, too, seemed to have fallen into listless ways, because there was no excitement for him in camp and all he had to do was to eat his share of the meat and crunch many a juicy rib of elk and deer.

He had been stretched as close to the fire as he could stand it. Apparently he had been asleep for an hour. It was remarkable how much time that dog could put in sleeping.

But now he raised his head, pricked up his

ears and uttered a growl. Then he rose up and started down the wind.

Sam called him back but the next moment there came loud shouts and yells from half a dozen men.

Ben turned pale.

"Blackfeet!" he muttered, and rushed into the tepee for his gun.

"Come back here, you fool youngster!" Sam called after him. "Those aren't Indians. The trappers have come. Get back here, Prince!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TRAPPERS

THE trappers were as much surprised as Ben and Prince, when they found who occupied that camp in Pierre's Hole.

"Sniff the wind, men," Rufus Stone had said to his six companions, when they had approached within two miles of the camp. "I swan one of the gangs has beaten us to it. Don't you smell the camp fire? Glad I am. We are all wolfishly hungry, and that bunch can broil the meat and brew the coffee, while we unpack the horses."

When they came close enough to see the camp-fire, they all felt sure that some of their friends were already encamped at the place of rendezvous, but when in response to their shouts they were greeted by a wild-eyed boy, a tall, lean young man, and a fierce growling dog they were dumfounded. Where were the men and the horses?

"Right glad to see you, lads!" Stone

greeted them, when he had convinced himself that they were neither ghosts nor Indians. "When did you join the bunch? Where do you come from? Where are Larkin and his men?"

"Rufus, don't you see that these lads don't know what you're talking about?" broke in one of the men. "You think you're in Pierre's Hole; they know you aren't. I told you, you missed the trail in the fog day before yesterday. Devil knows where we are!"

"The fog on your brain, Storkins!" exclaimed Stone. "I'm surprised your mother ever raised you. You couldn't find your way across a town lot. I know where we are. Haven't we seen the Three Tetons all day? Now sit down, and let these boys talk. We're at our rendezvous in Pierre's Hole. But where are Larkin and his men, and who are you boys? I suppose Larkin has gone off to do some more trapping in the mountains?"

At first Stone would not believe that no trappers had come to the valley before he and his men arrived; and when Sam related briefly how he and Ben had come from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Bridger and Fort Hall,

and then from Fort Hall to this secluded mountain valley, Rufus Stone shook his head and looked doubtfully at Sam.

“It’s a strange story, young man,” he commented. “If it isn’t true, you are an awfully good liar, one of the best I have ever seen, and there are some good ones in these mountains.

“But now, if you and the kid will broil some buffalo ribs over your fire and make us some coffee, while we pile up the baggage and attend to the horses, maybe we shall believe your story.”

When the trappers were by themselves, several of the men expressed strong doubt as to the truth of Sam’s story.

“Look out for them, Stone,” the cautious Storkins advised his leader. “I don’t believe a word of it. Came all the way from Fort Leavenworth, just four brats of them. That Lanky Sam says the Blackfeet got the other two near Independence Rock.

“It’s a lie, I say. They’re spies of the blasted Company. Old Ramsay Crooks has had a bright idea to spy on us independent trappers. He and the other blasted Company

sharks think we won't suspect any smooth-faced youngsters. I say, look out, Stone, they are trying to find out if we discovered any new beaver country, or if they can do us up in some other way."

"The blasted Company," as every man in the mountains knew in those days was the American Fur Company, which practically controlled the fur trade in the United States. Although it always had competitors and was never a legalized monopoly like the Hudson Bay Company in British North America, the independent trappers and traders were nevertheless always ready to join hands against the Company.

In reality the heads of the company, John Jacob Astor and Ramsay Crooks, were able and patriotic men, who conducted a big business in a lawless country.

Astor's venture of founding Astoria as told by Washington Irving did much to secure Oregon for the United States.

The story of four boys coming alone all the way from Fort Leavenworth and two of them being captured by the Blackfeet sounded to these old trappers too much like the bear

stories and Indian stories which they themselves freely invented or, at least, liberally elaborated and exaggerated to thrill credulous tenderfeet.

"It's a big lie," was the consensus of their opinion. "Somebody wants to lure us into the Blackfoot country. Of course, if we knew that the yarn was true, it would be a fine chance to even up some old scores."

"Now, think a bit, men," Stone tried to argue with them. "It sounds like a true story to me. Both of the lads tell it the same way, and with some details that would be hard to invent. The trouble is, you fellows are all such liars yourselves that you think everybody else belongs to your class."

The men laughed good-naturedly at this thrust, but they were not convinced.

Lanky Sam had the boy primed to tell everything just so. The company had put over many smooth tricks on the independent trappers. This was another one. It had all the earmarks of Crooks and Astor of New York and of Chouteau and McKenzie of the U. M. O., the Upper Missouri Outfit.

Sam felt that Rufus Stone, in spite of his

jocular remark, really believed him, but that the other men doubted his story.

After supper, Sam carefully unwrapped the message Al had left under the camp rubbish. He felt sure this would convince them of the honesty of his statements.

They all looked it over and read it with great care, all except Storkins. Storkins could not read without his specs, and he had lost those, while he was being chased by a grizzly on the Clearwater two months ago. Since then the story of Storkins' pawning his specs with the grizzly had been told so many times with so many embellishments, garnishments, and variations that it no longer sounded funny to Storkins.

Sam knew how the independent trappers felt toward the American Fur Company, but he had not realized how far their suspicions would go in any matter which their mind had once connected with the company. They were not convinced by Al's very convincing message. It all looked too plausible, just like one of those sharp tricks of the company.

Had Stone never heard the story how about ten years ago Drips and Vanderburgh of the

American Fur Company kept trailing Fitzpatrick and Bridger for hundreds of miles over this very country? But Bridger and his partner were too wise for their pursuers and led them straight into the Blackfoot country of the three forks, the Madison, Jefferson, and Gallatin.

The chase ended by Vanderburgh and one of his men being killed by Blackfeet. But Bridger and his party also got into a fight with the Blackfeet, in which Bridger lost his horse and was struck in the back by two arrows. Bridger and his men escaped with their lives, but Bridger carried one of the arrowheads in his back for three years, as has been told before, until Dr. Marcus Whitman, the missionary, cut it out at the rendezvous on Green River in the summer of 1836, when he was on his way to Oregon.

This story about the two boys being captured by the Blackfeet, and the note left by them might be true, perhaps. They admitted that it sounded pretty straight, but the Blackfeet were a pretty bad lot of Indians to deal with, and just as bad now as ten years ago.

Ben, who had been quietly listening to all

the talk, was mad all through, when he and Sam, at last, retired to their tepee.

“Look here, Sam,” he protested, “that’s a fine bunch of old scoundrels! After we fix up a fine supper for them and feed them on a lot of our bacon just as a treat, they pretty near come right out and tell us we are liars. I tell you what, Sam, if I had been a man, there would have been a fight. Why didn’t you pull the beard of some of the nasty old fellows?”

CHAPTER XXVII

ALDERS AND BRONC

“DON’T talk like that of those men!” Sam reproached the young boy. “They may not be much on smooth talk, but they are honest, straightforward men, and you had better be respectful to them, as becomes a youngster of your age.”

“I didn’t mean to be disrespectful to them,” Ben apologized, “but it made me angry to have them think we are liars and spies.”

“Oh, never mind,” Sam objected with a laugh, “just let that pass. When I think it over, I see that our story sounds a little bit strange, just a little bit too much like one of their own yarns.”

Before Ben fell asleep he had been convinced that theirs was a case where getting mad would do no good, and that a fight with the trappers would have been a very foolish and a very useless fight.

In the morning Stone came to Sam and Ben's tepee to explain and excuse the behavior of his men.

"They are a pretty hard set of men," he admitted, "blunt, outspoken, and suspicious of strangers, whose motives for being in this country are not clear to them. They are always on their guard in matters of business, against all traders, especially against the American Fur Company. Against the Indians they have to be on the watch day and night, if they would save their lives and their hard-earned wealth in furs. So you can see why they should be suspicious of all strangers, but they are, nevertheless, brave, stalwart men, and if you once gain their confidence and friendship they will stand by you to the last ounce of powder in their pouch.

"Don't be offended at their talk and ways, but just go on and mind your own business. If your story is true, they will come to see the truth of it of their own accord."

Within a few days two more parties of trappers arrived at the winter camp. Stone's large party of twenty-five men had separated for their fall trapping into three

smaller groups, because in that way they could more conveniently trap on a larger number of small streams; but they all had agreed to meet in Pierre's Hole about December first.

Two of the men did not appear at the rendezvous. One of them had been killed in an accident with his horse and the other had been ambushed and killed by Indians.

There was naturally a good deal of excitement, when the two parties came in. Stories of good luck and bad luck were exchanged, and Sam and Ben listened with interest and wonder to their stories of danger and adventure on the wild rivers and mountains, and among savage Indians.

Although the party did not trap during the winter, they were by no means idle.

It took one or two men to take care of and guard a herd of some fifty horses; several men went out hunting almost daily, others made depuyer and pemmican, and each night was divided into three watches, when at least one man was on guard duty.

Every night all the horses were turned into a large corral, for Rufus Stone would take

no chances on having his company left horseless in the mountains.

"It has taken us nearly two years," he told the lads, "of the hardest kind of work to gather these seventy packs of beaver. They are worth from eight hundred to a thousand dollars a pack, and it is my duty to see that we get them safely shipped to St. Louis. The men sometimes grumble at herding horses and standing guard at night, saying no Indians will come into the valley at night, but I have seen too many lives and too much valuable property lost through sheer carelessness. Indians are pretty sure to appear, when you are not on guard against them.

"If we do not grow careless, no Indian tribe in the mountains can do us serious injury, so, whether the men like it or not, they will herd the horses in the daytime and stand guard at night."

Half a dozen fast saddle-horses were always kept in the corral to be ready for any emergency, and these animals were fed on brush and bark of poplar trees.

Men in the mountains of course, had to be their own tailors and shoemakers; and moc-

casins and all articles of clothing wore out fast with much hard usage.

But although the trappers had much work to do, they still had a good deal of time for fun and sociability.

Wonderful stories, some true and some boldly impossible, were told at the camp fires; of Indian fights and buffalo hunts, of exploits with grizzly bears and panthers, of narrow escapes on dangerous rivers and in fierce snowstorms. One of the men had seen the geysers and hot springs of the Yellowstone, but the other men had called him a liar so often that he refused to repeat the story of what he had seen.

On fine days the men arranged for exciting horse-races and shooting-matches.

The shooting-matches were not the tame affairs of a modern target range, where a man stands up or lies down and carefully aims at his target. No, these shooting-matches were a kind of informal drill, designed to make each man a dead shot with a pistol, and in that way make him a formidable Indian fighter.

Some ten posts, about fifty yards apart,

had been set in the ground. Each trapper, mounted on a fast horse, rode past these posts at full speed, and the man who could not hit eight posts out of ten was not considered a good shot.

In this target practice the men kept the posts to their left, for the posts represented Indians, and the drill was to prepare the men for a sharp running fight with hostile Indians.

Two of the men, nicknamed Alders and Bronc, were great jokers. Most of their jokes and pranks were harmless enough, but if a man went too far on the Munchausen type of stories, or bragged too much, or was inclined to shirk work in camp, Alders and Bronc would spend days in devising some plan for teaching him a sharp lesson.

The first man who incurred the displeasure of the jokers was Storkins. Whenever a story-teller admitted that he had been scared stiff, that his hair felt as if it would rise through his hat when he heard his first Indian war whoop, Storkins declared that he had never been scared by anything in the

mountains, neither Indians, nor bears, nor panthers, nor snakes.

"Storkins," remarked Bronc one day, "I guess you are a regular Napoleon. You never were scared of anything."

"No, I don't easily excite, boys," Storkins admitted, quite flattered, but Sam who was sitting near by thought he noticed a shrewd twinkle in Bronc's eye.

A few days later, the stories in camp began to run to snakes. Most of the stories, however, although some of them gruesome enough, had happened in Mexico, Southern Illinois, or Florida, where one of the men had taken part in the Seminole war of 1837.

But it was not long before the scene of the stories was shifted to Pierre's Hole. Three of the men told that they had been opposed to camping there, because it was a regular snake-hole.

"There are no snakes here in winter," several men claimed.

"You would naturally think so," one of their companions agreed, "but that is where you are mistaken. On warm, sunny days, the

horrible creatures come out of their dens and crawl about in the grass and try to get under the beds in the tepees. I reckon the foolish things take the tepees for rocks and just try to get under warm cover."

"Well, boys," said Storkins, in whose tepee the men were gathered after supper, "they are small and harmless."

"Storkins," one of the men objected, "you don't know anything about them. The rattlesnakes here are the biggest in the country. Five years ago, when I camped here with some Nez Percés, I saw one crawl along the river, just at this time of the year. I was going to camp for supper and I emptied my pistol at him, but he never stopped. I declare he was at least five yards long.

"That night old Indian Joe was bitten by a rattler in his tepee."

Then the speaker told with much detail, how Indian Joe, being a medicine man, tried all the remedies known to the mountain tribes, and how in spite of all his skill he died in great agony.

At this point one of the listeners started a

dispute and called on Storkins to bear him out. But Storkins suddenly took on a wild-eyed look, sprang up from his bed on which he had been reclining, rushed for the opening and yelled:

“Get out of there, boys! That snake is under my bed. Great Scott, I felt him uncoil and saw him crawl out.”

A roar of laughter from half a dozen men met him outside.

“You’re scared plumb crazy!” Alders exclaimed. “There runs Bronc with the lariat he had coiled up under your bed. Go and look at it!”

After this, Storkins could never again tell a story in which he himself claimed to have shown any bravery.

Sam and Ben by following the advice of Rufus Stone gradually gained the friendship of the men, but did not entirely escape their pranks.

A bunch of wild ponies, led by a swift black-and-white pinto, often came close to the horses of the trappers. Ben had often wished that he had an Indian pony, and he had prac-

ticed throwing a rope and catching horses as the Indians and trappers caught some of their half wild animals.

One morning, when Sam had gone off hunting with some of the men, the bunch of wild ponies came very close to camp and the trappers urged Ben to try his skill on the pinto.

“There’s your chance, lad,” Brone told him, “if you want to corral the pinto. Take your best horse and go after him. If you ride around and head the bunch toward camp, you’ll get them rattled and rope the pinto. And if you catch the leader, maybe you can round up the whole bunch.”

Ben lost no time to act on this suggestion and already felt himself the proud possessor of the whole bunch of Indian ponies.

“You’ll sure count a coup, if you catch that pinto,” Brone called after him, when he dashed away.

But the ponies were wiser than Ben had believed them to be. They could not be headed for camp. As soon as they saw a horseman come after them, they turned short around and headed down the valley. But Ben had come closer to them than he had

ever been before and he spurred his horse to his best speed.

For a while he was gaining on the herd, but when the animals saw that they were being pursued in earnest, they began to draw away from Ben. However, the boy kept going, thinking that he would soon tire them out. But instead of tiring the ponies, his own horse soon became winded, while the ponies, drawing farther and farther away, stopped and looked at him from time to time, as if to say: "Aren't you coming?"

About two hours later Ben returned to camp very much crestfallen and almost in tears, his horse still wet and utterly tired out.

"I can't catch him," he said, choking down the tears. "They're too fast for my horse."

When the boy had disappeared into his lodge, Alders angrily rebuked his friend of many jokes:

"Bronc, you bloody old Indian," he reviled him, "aren't you ashamed of playing one of your dirty tricks on a small boy? I reckon you'd be mean enough to scalp a baby before he has any hair. The boy doesn't even sus-

pect that you guyed him. Confound your shriveled old hide, Bronc! I'll get the boys to string you up on the big poplar, if you don't get on your old Pawnee mare right away and help me catch that pinto!"

Bronc tried to argue the matter. "'Look here now, Alders," he protested. "I've got to finish these moccasins, I am almost bare-footed now. I didn't think the kid would take it so hard. I'm not sure, we can catch that fool pinto in any way we try."

"Get on your hoss, I say," Alders repeated. "Shame on you for fooling an unsuspecting boy! Get a move on, old man. I'll never help you play another trick, if you don't help me catch that pinto!"

The last threat seemed to have helped Bronc to make up his mind, and in half an hour the two men quietly rode out of camp, each leading an extra horse.

"We are just going to have a little fun by ourselves," Alders told one of the men, who wanted to know what deviltry was under way now.

The two men knew the country and the habits of the herd of ponies they were after,

and in about two hours they came in sight of the pinto and his bunch.

Alders now mounted his extra horse, which was a fast animal and not at all tired. For several miles he drove the wild ponies down the valley, then he turned them so that they would have to pass a narrow canyon at the end of which Bronc was waiting on his fast Pawnee mare.

The wild ponies, by this time were getting tired, but when they saw themselves trapped in a canyon, there began a wild scramble from one end of the canyon to the other. But whenever they approached one of the exits, a fearsome-looking horseman with a coiled rope dashed at them and barred the way. In this way, even the wily and almost tireless pinto could, at last, not keep out of the horsemen's way. Bronc threw the rope around his neck, and the Pawnee mare stretched the rope and threw the wild pinto sprawling on the ground.

Before the wild animal had time to get his wind, Alders had a heavy Spanish saddle on him and was on his back. For ten or fifteen minutes the pinto reared and kicked and

bucked, then he gave up the contest. By this time he was so tired out that it took a sharp touch of the rowels to make him move at all, and just before sunset, Alders rode the pinto up to Ben's lodge.

"Come out here, kid!" he called. "Here's that gol-durned pinto. He's a well-broke hoss, I swear. I'm tired of riding the critter, you get in the saddle and ride him around a bit!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TRAPPER'S PLAN

AFTER the event with the pinto, Ben was like the adopted son of Bronc and Alders. They willingly taught him woodcraft and horsemanship, they showed him how to tan hides and make moccasins, and they never tired of telling him innumerable hair-raising stories of their life in the mountains and among the Indians. When the other men twitted them with the lies with which they filled the boy's head, they angrily resented the gibes and vowed that to the kid they told nothing but the gospel truth.

Sam had followed Stone's advice, and had never argued again or explained his story to the trappers; but there had gradually come a change of heart over the men. They no longer doubted the story as Sam had told it. They had seen no indication that the lads were spies of the company. There was no doubt that the lads were just two tenderfeet, who

had actually undertaken the dangerous journey across the plains and the mountains in company with two other tenderfoot kids who had been captured by the Blackfeet.

The loss of their friend Stubbs, the men also laid to a marauding band of Blackfeet. They had found the body of Stubbs scalped and mutilated, and his furs and traps gone. But of the perpetrators of the outrage they had found no trace, except some moccasin-tracks in the soft mud of a beaver dam. All the other tribes in that part of the mountains, the Shoshones, the Nez Percés, and the Flat-heads were friendly to the whites. They might steal some unguarded horses, but they would not commit murder. There was no doubt in the mind of any one that some young Blackfeet had committed the crime, and the tribe ought to be so severely punished that none of them would again touch a white man.

"We can lick the whole blooming tribe," some of the hot-heads declared, "and we ought to go after them as soon as we can cross the range, to catch them before they get away."

"Yes, you fellows are good at big talk,"

Stone remonstrated with them. "Why didn't you go after the rascals that raised the hair off poor Stubbs? They're the gang you should have licked. You could have found them, all right, if you had only gone after them instead of pulling out of the country as soon as you found a few redskins were prowling around.

"I'm not going to start a war on the Black-feet and have them make wolf-meat of half of you fellows. I want to bring you back to St. Louis. And I reckon, you want to take your furs with you and not slave two long years in the mountains for nothing."

The mountain trappers in those days were in many respects white men turned Indians. Like Indians they did not always obey their leader, and they often committed outrages against the Indians that were worse than those which the Indians committed against the whites.

When, at last, spring came and the trappers were ready to move, Stone had his plans and orders ready.

Most of the men he asked to remain in the main camp. "You may trap any of the

streams you can reach from the main camp, without being away more than a few days, but at least half of you must stay and guard the camp. We have now about seventy packs of fur, each worth nearly a thousand dollars, or even more. It is all we have to show for two years of work and hardship and danger.

“We also leave most of the horses with you. Take care of them, men! Don't let any Indians put us afoot. If you do, all our work is lost, because we can not take our furs to market!”

With ten of the coolest and most reliable men, Stone proposed to cross the range into the Blackfoot country to discover, if possible, the whereabouts of the lost boys.

He tried to persuade Sam and Ben to remain in camp with the other men, explaining that this trip into the Blackfoot country would be a hard and very dangerous venture, even to the most hardened and experienced mountain men.

But the two lads pleaded so earnestly to be allowed to join them that Stone gave them permission to come along, the lads assuring him that they would, like good soldiers, obey

his orders to the very letter and that they would not flinch at any hardship or danger.

Ben wanted to ride his pinto across the ridge, but Stone ruled against this good-naturedly.

“You take a fast bay pony, my son,” he said. “There will be no pintos and white horses on this trip. They shine too much on the prairie.”

So sure-footed were the ponies which the men rode that they crossed the mountains without accident, although the snow had not yet entirely disappeared from the higher ridges.

When the party arrived at the headwaters of the Jefferson Fork, Stone divided his party. Five men were left at this place with orders to fortify their camp, as the trappers often did in those days. They were not to allow any Indian war party to follow the trail on which the men had crossed, but otherwise they were to keep themselves concealed, and under no circumstances were they to do any hunting or trapping, but they were to live on the food they had brought with them. Their camp was so hidden by the pines and

poplars of the foot-hills that it could not be discovered until one was almost upon it.

“Put out your fire as soon as you are through cooking, boys, and place a man on guard every night,” were Stone’s parting commands. “We may be gone three days,” he added, “or three weeks. And possibly we may never come back. But if we have to run for our lives, we must depend on you to hold a place of refuge for us; where we can make a stand.”

It was late in the afternoon when Rufus Stone, with five of his best men, with the two lads and the dog Prince, bade farewell to the camp in the foothills. In single file, and as silently as possible they followed a small creek toward the Jefferson Fork. About midnight they halted in a grove of cottonwoods, where the ponies could feed, while the men lay down to sleep.

At daybreak they continued their dangerous scouting, for they all realized that they might now at any time fall in with, or be discovered by small hunting parties, if the Gros Ventre Blackfeet had actually wintered on the Jefferson Fork.

About noon they struck the place where the creek joined a larger stream, which Stone felt sure was the Jefferson Fork.

Farther down this stream, the country became so open, that it would have been impossible for a number of horsemen to remain undiscovered.

Stone therefore decided that at this place the men should remain with the horses, while he and the two lads, taking the dog with them, continued their scouting on foot.

"It's a hard and dangerous game," the leader cautioned them. "You must make no fire. Keep the horses staked, and one of you must remain awake nights. You can take turns sleeping during the day. The boys and I carry food to last us about six days. Here's good-bye and good luck to all of us!"

Stone and the boys slowly picked their way down stream, taking care to remain under cover of the poplars and willows, which were beginning to show the first signs of spring.

From time to time the little party carefully crawled to some high point, which offered a **view** of the valley. The keen eyes of the

leader discovered buffalo and elk and even saw a grizzly take a drink at the river, but of human beings, red or white, the mountaineer could not discover a sign. No tepees, no herds of ponies were visible on the plain, not even a haze or wreath of smoke could he discover.

"Let me see that message again," he said anxiously to Sam, when the party stopped at a spring at dusk.

"That message" referred to the few words Al had scrawled on a piece of buckskin. This piece of buckskin and the medicine of the old Shawnee, Sam always carried on his person.

Sam carefully unwrapped his treasure, which in spite of all his care had grown a little more soiled and blurred; nevertheless the words were there clear enough: "Winter Jeff Fork." If they meant anything at all, they must mean that the Gros Ventres planned to spend the winter on the Jefferson Fork of the Missouri.

"Yes," Stone granted in a low voice, "it says, 'Winter Jeff Fork' all right. But it beats me, how Al could find out anything about their plans, when he didn't know a word

of Blackfoot, and could not use the sign language."

"It is too deep for me," Sam frankly admitted. "But I am sure that it is Al's message and that we have read it right."

"I think we did," Stone agreed, "but the cue is all wrong, Sam. They aren't here, and I don't think they have been here. You never saw elk and antelope feed so quietly within the hunting radius of a big Indian camp. We'll scout down the valley for another twenty miles, but I don't think we'll find a single Blackfoot tepee.

"Well, Sam, this mountain life is a gamble for one's hair every day. If I ever get back to St. Louis with my packs, I shall follow General Ashley's example and stay at home with my wife and children.

"What do you say about taking chances on making a fire for a cup of tea? It would cheer us up and make us forget that we are dog-tired. After eating our supper we can slip down stream a way to sleep."

Sam was willing to take the chance, for he and Ben were as tired and cold as their guide.

After they had eaten their supper of pem-

mican and had each enjoyed a big cup of hot, sweet tea, they found a well-sheltered place and rolled up in their blankets.

"Don't one of us have to stand guard?" asked Ben, who felt as if there was an Indian hiding behind every bush and tree.

"No, sonny," Stone assured him, "not while we have the dog with us."

On the following day, the fears of the old mountaineer were fully realized. There was not an Indian or a fresh sign of Indians anywhere on the Jefferson.

What could have happened? Perhaps the Crows had followed the Gros Ventres, and the latter had decided not to make their winter camp so close to the country of their enemies, but had gone on to the Marias River in Canada. To follow them that far would be making a mad dash into the very heart of the great Blackfeet country and would make a safe return almost impossible.

The old mountaineer, who had many times read the Indian mind, and outwitted or surprised them, spent a restless night. Granting that Al's information was correct, why

had these Indians changed their plan, and where had they gone?

Putting all his information together, he decided that no Crows had pursued the Arapaho Blackfeet. If a large number of Crows had followed them, Sam and Ben would have seen them. And it was not at all likely that the Crows had taken up a trail that was over a week old.

He considered the probability of their being on the Madison or the Gallatin Fork, but that would leave them still nearer to the country of their enemies. There was one other possibility. They might be on a fine sheltered ground on the Big Hole River, farther to the northwest and nearer the foothills of the mountains.

"Boys, we shall have to take a gamble on those Reds," Stone concluded his mind-reading of the Indians. "If they are not in the valley of the Big Hole, then they did not stay in this neck of the land, but kept right on going into Canada."

In the morning they struck out straight west.

“Save your wind, lads,” their guide admonished the boys. “It is going to be a hard trip. We have not much time to lose, if we want to catch them in their winter camp. We have not any too much meat with us, we don’t dare to hunt in this country, and you would not relish living on broiled snakes.”

“Mr. Stone,” Ben asked rather timidly not quite sure whether the old man was in earnest, “you never had to eat snakes, did you?”

“Well, sonny,” replied Stone, laughing, “I’ve seen some hard days in the mountains. Most of us old-timers have I reckon I have eaten almost every kind of flesh that lives on the plains and in the mountains and some of it looked awfully much like snake. Well, God made them all, buffalo and beaver, turtle, and rattlesnake. We prefer fat buffalo, but buffalo or no buffalo, I never saw an old-timer starve in these mountains.”

The trip was, indeed, a hard one. Up-hill and down-hill, over rocks and cactus-patches, through brush and across wild creeks the old man led the way. He did not seem to exert himself nor did he hesitate about his way.

The lads would have liked to ask many questions, but they needed all their wind to keep up with their guide, who was always a good bit in the lead.

“Aren’t you looking out for Indians at all, Mr. Stone?” asked Ben, when they made a short halt for lunch at a mountain spring.

“No, not here. You are likely to run into Reds, if you are traveling on their regular trails, but when you strike across the brush and rocks as we are doing, you are not likely to meet them. It is not the kind of country they like.”

Toward evening they came to a hollow, covered with a dense stand of slender lodge-pole pine, where the ground was soft and covered with a thick mat of dry needles.

“This looks like a good camp to me,” remarked Stone, as he dropped his blankets. “I think we have come far enough.”

Then he put four stakes into the ground and told the boys to hang their blankets over them. Within the walls of blankets the old man quickly built a small fire of dry sticks. In about ten minutes he had made a pailful of tea and had fried some slices of bacon.

To have strips of fragrant, juicy bacon with the pemmican and sweet tea was a feast for the lads, especially as they did not know that the old man had taken along any bacon, a very rare commodity in the mountains.

"Fall to, boys," the guide invited them. "I thought you deserved a treat to-night. You did well on a hard trip. Scrape some sand on the fire, Sam, we are through with it for to-night."

"May I give the dog an extra piece of meat, Mr. Stone?" asked Ben.

"Do so, boy! The dog behaved well. He followed us closely and didn't try to chase after any game. Give him an extra slice of pemmican."

While they were eating, darkness fell over the mountain forest. The stars looked silently through the tops of the slender pines, a brook babbled over the rocks toward the Big Hole, and in the distance hooted an owl and yapped the coyotes and howled the gray wolves.

Had the boys been alone they would have found the solitude depressing and fearsome, but the old mountaineer was in high spirits.

For an hour he sat leaning against a tree and told in a low voice of his adventures with the wild beasts of the mountains and the still wilder Indians.

When he had finished his tales, he seemed to sniff the air for a minute, before he took off his moccasins and spread out his blanket.

“Time to roll in, boys,” he suggested. “If those Blackfeet camped on this side of the line, we should find them to-morrow. Good night, lads! Have a good sleep. We’ll have breakfast at daylight, and go after them again!”

CHAPTER XXIX

AFTER THEM AGAIN

THE lads had become so accustomed to sleep in the open, that the dawn of day, which softly calls all out-of-door sleepers, did not arouse them. But the old trapper arose, quickly made a warm breakfast of hot pemmican and tea and sang out, "Roll out, roll out, ye knights of the blanket! Breakfast is served in Lodgepole Hall!" Sam was awake at once, but Ben did not stir until Prince licked his face.

"I think we shall soon see that camp," Stone remarked still in high spirits, as they noiselessly picked their way through the edge of the foot-hill timber. But when the dense stand of timber thinned out to isolated groves, the face of the old man became dejected.

Below them lay the valley of the Big Hole, with winding groves of aspen and willows indicating the course of the stream, but of Indians there was no sign. Nothing but a

beautiful uninhabited mountain valley lay stretched out before them. A few long-tailed magpies displayed their black-and-white plumage as they chattered curiously in the pines, and a song-sparrow trilled his simple ditty from a bush, happy in his lowly seclusion and unconcerned about the world around him. Some wild ducks swam quietly about on a pool below, on whose edge the grass began to show a faint tint of green.

"I fear we are beat at the game, lads," the old trapper spoke sadly. "I felt sure we should find the camp in the valley right below. They can't have pulled up stakes and struck out for their summer hunting-grounds in Canada. It is still too early in the season. The ice has not melted on the beaver ponds and the buffalo have not started north. I even thought I smelled their camp fires and kettles last night."

"You could not really smell them, Mr. Stone. Could you?" Ben asked.

"I surely thought I did," the old man asserted. "You see I don't smoke or chew tobacco, and I have often smelled Indians and buffaloes or rain, when my men could smell

nothing but their old black pipes. A man who hunts and traps in these wild mountains as long as I have done, must keep a sharp edge on all his senses, or he will go under."

Ben looked at his friend as if he had not quite understood.

"Yes, he'll go under, get rubbed out, if he isn't all eyes and ears and nose. And on top of it all he must develop a kind of sixth sense for scenting danger and reading signs.

"It's no wonder that so many men go under in this mountain life. The Indians are always ready to rub out a careless man. A bear or a vicious horse may kill him. He may break through ice, get drowned in rapids, get lost and freeze to death in a storm. It's no wonder that many a man who goes in, is never heard of again.

"Well, lads, I have to admit it. I guess my reckoning has gone wrong this time. Those are the times,—yes those are the times, when they get you," he closed his reflections.

"When who gets you?" Ben ventured to ask.

"The Indians, my lad," Stone replied slowly, "or the bears, or maybe the snow-

storm. When you haven't figured right, or read the signs right. That's the time something gets you," he finished gloomily.

"Like a poor doctor, I have made a wrong diagnosis; and now my medicine is all wrong."

"Sam has some strong Indian medicine," Ben blurted out.

The old man's gloomy face was suddenly lighted by a smile.

"What is it, Sam?" he asked. "The old chiefs have some strange medicine for every ailment and for every kind of bad luck; and the stranger their medicine, the stouter is the faith of their followers."

"I can't tell what it is," Sam replied, "but my old Shawnee friend, Chief Moquah, did give me some medicine, when he warned us against the Blackfeet. He said they were bad, heap bad Indians."

"He did not tell you a lie, my boy," Stone admitted grimly. "But just now I wish the old Shawnee had given you some medicine that would draw the Blackfeet out of their hiding-place.

"Let us scout down to the river. If we

don't find them within ten miles of this place, my medicine was all wrong."

There were no signs of an Indian camp on the east side of the river, but there was no game in the hole, either.

"It's all blazed queer," muttered Stone. "If there are no Indians in the neighborhood, this hole ought to be full of game."

When they had crossed the rapid stream, the old man's face brightened. There were still neither Indians nor game visible, but there was abundant sign of ponies. The sign was not fresh, but it was not very old either.

"It is two weeks or a month old," pronounced the mountaineer, after he had closely examined the tracks, the cropped grass and bushes and every other sign.

"If they are in this valley, they are farther up-stream," the old guide resumed cheerfully. "Let us scout up carefully with the wind. Follow in my track and keep under cover."

For an hour perhaps, the old man picked his way in silence. At several open spaces, he called "Down," and then all three crawled

on hands and knees to the nearest cover ahead.

At first, when the old guide called, "Down!" Ben's heart seemed to jump into his throat, but soon he understood that their guide only wanted to make sure that they would not be discovered by some stray hunter on the hills above them.

When they came to a place, where the stream made a sharp turn, the old man stopped.

"Let us rest a while," he said. "This stalking through the brush as if you were hunting deer, is hard work.

"If I remember right, the valley widens again a little way beyond this bend. Maybe, Sam, your medicine will work yet," he added with a smile.

Again they trailed cautiously through poplars and willows, and again and again the old man called in a low voice, "Down!"

Now he stopped and stood upright in a thicket of willows and motioned the boys to come forward.

Then he pointed to an opening through a grove of cottonwoods. "Look ahead," he

whispered. "Do you see those tepees about a mile off. I reckon they're the Injuns we've been hunting.

"Sit down. We'll eat a bite of pemmican. I am hungry now. This morning I had no appetite; but I'm sure a bite of cold meat will taste good now."

CHAPTER XXX

A CLOSE CALL

AFTER men and dog had eaten a hearty meal, the old man sat in silence for some time.

After a while Ben asked: "What are we going to do now, Mr. Stone?"

"Wait a bit, sonny," the old man answered pleasantly. "I am making medicine. We shall start pretty soon."

In a little while he was through thinking, or making medicine, as he had called it.

"Follow me, lads," he told the boys. "But keep low, and make no noise. Our game is to see without being seen. If we can't beat the Indians at their own game, we are lost."

After they had carefully walked and crept along for some time, they came to a plain Indian trail.

"Spread out a bit. We must not leave a trace of our crossing this trail," the guide whispered. "This is a dangerous place, let us get away from it."

The three men with the dog quickly crept up a gentle slope and concealed themselves in a thicket of young pines. Here they rested a while and examined their guns and pistols.

"If we were not trying to find the two captives," Stone said, "I should not be so afraid of being discovered. A small bunch of them could not do us much harm. But, if we are discovered, before we have found the boys, our search and our whole trip would be a failure. We should have to strike for cover and get out of this country as quick as possible."

"How are we going to find out," asked Ben, "if these are the Indians we are looking for?"

"I don't know, Ben," the old man confessed frankly. "They are no doubt Blackfeet. Just how we are going to find out, if they are the ones we want, I don't know, but we have to find out in some way."

The old man now picked his way along the slope above the Indian trail with the greatest caution. He was in no hurry, and stopped a while in every bit of good cover.

“Why don’t you use your spy-glass?” asked Ben, when the guide had looked intently for several minutes at some dark object in the distance across the valley.

“The fact is,” Stone informed the boy, “I am a little afraid to use it here. The glint of reflection from it might catch the eye of some Blackfoot, who would know at once that some white men are near their camp. They would at once begin to dog our trail and would be almost sure to catch us off our guard.”

The trapper had scarcely finished these words in a low voice, when a look of sternness mingled with anxiety suddenly spread over his bronzed face.

“Down! Down flat!” he whispered. “Don’t move. Watch the dog. Look east!”

The lads did not need the warning not to move, for when they did look toward the Indian trail below them, they had such a scare that they almost forgot to breathe.

In plain view, hardly a hundred yards away about a dozen Blackfeet hunters rode past. Two or three had guns, the others carried a bow and arrows, and some had only a spear. One of the extra ponies had a black-tail deer,

another had a bear slung and tied over the saddle. The hunters were riding along slowly, as if they were tired from a long trip, and they were followed by five or six tired and scrawny-looking dogs.

Had the hunters been looking for game or enemies, they would not have failed to discover the three white men, for the latter were so poorly concealed by some young pines and other small brush, that they expected the red hunters to see them and surround them every moment. If the wind had been favorable for the Indians, their dogs though tired and worn out, would have been sure to give the alarm.

"Great Teton!" muttered the trapper, when the Indians had vanished into a thicket of lodge-pole pine, "that was a dinged close call."

Sam as well as Ben were for a while too frightened to speak; for, although Stone had repeatedly cautioned them, and had pointed out the extreme peril of their situation, thanks to Stone's knowledge of the country and of Indians and his unflagging caution nothing had thus far occurred to drive these points home with the lads. They knew they

were traveling in a dangerous country, but under the old mountaineer's leadership, they did not seem to meet with any danger, and had little fear.

"What could we have done," asked Sam, when he felt sure that the Blackfeet were out of hearing and that no more were coming, "if they had discovered us?"

"Tried to smoke with them," the old trapper chuckled, "and act as if they were our long-lost friends."

"But you don't smoke, Mr. Stone," Ben objected.

"No, I don't, sonny, not by myself. But you should have seen me handle the pipe, with these Blackfeet, if they had caught us. With them I should have smoked anything, weeds, killikinnick, or tobacco. I always carry some tobacco, and it has helped me out of several scrapes."

"Will I have to smoke if we get caught?" asked Ben.

"No boy, you wouldn't," the trapper laughed, "but if you did and got sick, they would think it a good joke and the whole camp would have a good laugh about it."

"I thought Indians didn't laugh much?" Ben asked.

"Indians not laugh?" Stone replied. "Who told you that? Amongst themselves they are the greatest gossipers and jokers you ever saw. When they have plenty to eat and have lost no scalps they don't do anything else, but laugh and visit and gossip all day long. They don't like to be laughed at by white men, although they have no end of fun at a white tenderfoot.

"But let us get away from this place, another band of hunters might come along, who are more wide awake. I think we had better sneak a little farther into the timber."

In the middle of the afternoon they came to an open slope, which extended from the hills into the valley.

"Well," remarked Stone, "hang it, boys, but here we are stuck until after dark. We don't dare to cross this open space in daylight, and it would be too much hard work to climb around it.

"You lie low here and keep quiet, while I do a little hunting with a club. Our meat is running so low that I am afraid we shall

have to eat snakes before we get back to one of our camps."

Just before dark, when the boys were beginning to fear that their guide was lost, he returned with a porcupine.

"Come along, boys," he said, "I have found a nice little hollow where we can roast him without being caught at it."

In a short time, the porcupine was skinned, and four good sized pieces of meat were roasting over the fire, three for the men and one for the dog.

"It may taste a little flat to you, without salt," the old man remarked, "but everything goes in the mountains. Porcupines were made on purpose for hungry men without guns, and for men like ourselves, who don't dare to use their guns.

"Fall to, boys. Young porcupine is not half bad. Much better than rattlesnake or old wolf. If you ever get to Oregon you may eat some real beef again and pork roast, and perhaps your mother will bake you a pie and a cake, but to-night we dine on roast porcu à la Blackfeet."

With his mother Ben would have argued

that he would rather eat just half a ration of pemmican, but he knew that with Rufus Stone he would either have to eat his share of porcupine or go to bed hungry. So he tried to imagine that he was eating mountain rabbit and made a good meal.

"I am glad you like it, boys," Stone remarked dryly. "We shall save the rest for to-morrow. You see, boys, after we start for camp, we may want to travel pretty fast and shall probably not have time to hunt for fresh meat."

When the meal was over, Stone raked sand on the coals; each one took a drink out of the little stream that came down from a snow-bank above them, and then they traveled silently across the open slope before them and soon disappeared into the timber beyond.

"I think, lads, we had better den up for the night," suggested the old man, when they had come to a well-sheltered spot, where the pines had already spread for them a soft bed of dry needles. "Traveling through the woods at night is such slow going that it does not pay for the effort, unless you are trying to slip away from the redskins.

“Never mind the wolves. Let them howl. And you need not be afraid of Indians here in the pine forest. There is no game here and no fur and they never come that far up the mountains. So just roll in and go to sleep; I shall call you at daylight.”

The lads were so nearly worn out with climbing and crawling and the constant fear of being discovered that they were more than glad to camp; and they fell asleep as promptly as they had ever done in their own beds at home.

CHAPTER XXXI

A HORSE AND A DOG

IN the morning, the trapper did not build a fire, so the party made their breakfast on cold pemmican and a drink of water from a mountain spring.

They had slept in the forest almost directly above the Blackfoot camp, and the boys expected that the trapper would approach the camp as close as possible to look for some indication of the presence of the white boys. But when the old man started to travel farther up the valley, Sam could not refrain from asking, "Aren't we going to try, Mr. Stone, to get a look at their camp? Al and Dick may be right there."

"I think not, boys," the old man spoke seriously. "I have already had my glass on the camp. It is so placed that it is almost impossible to get close to it without being discovered.

"We know by the hunters that passed us

that it is a Blackfoot camp, but from this distance I can see no sign of our friends being with these Indians, and I am afraid of working closer up to the camp.

“I have tried hard to figure it all out, and I do not think the boys would be in camp at this time. Indians generally make their prisoners do some kind of work; so I think the boys would either be with some hunting party, or they would be herding ponies, or they might possibly be set to trapping beaver. The Blackfeet are good warriors and hunters, but they are poor trappers. I guess trapping is too much like white man’s work for them.”

The three men now traveled along as fast as they could without exposing themselves or starting any rocks rolling down the mountain slope.

After some hours of hard and slow traveling, they came in sight of a herd of ponies, that were grazing on a slope on the other side of the river. When the mountaineer saw those ponies he at once looked for a good safe cover, took off his pack, and began to examine the herd.

“Look sharp, boys,” he said, “and see if you can find any American horses in that herd. And see, if you can discover any herders.”

The herd, which might have contained some five hundred animals, presented the usual appearance of a herd of half wild Indian ponies. Blacks, bays, and roans, with a few whites and grays, just as the accidents of the wild plains had bred and raised them. A few of the mares were already followed by colts a few weeks or days old.

“Gee-withers,” remarked Ben, thinking of the hoar-frost, which was still on the grass in shaded places, and of the chilly breeze which was flowing down from the mountains, “why don’t they keep the mares in a warm shed at night and feed them some hay till the weather gets warm. I should think the poor little colts would all freeze to death.”

The trapper laughed aloud at Ben’s remarks about the Indians keeping mares and colts in a shed.

“Why, boys,” he replied, “you might as well think of one of these wild Indians teach-

ing a Sunday-school class as expect him to build a shed or make hay for his ponies. The most the Indians ever do for their horses is to cut down some cottonwood trees for them in winter; outside of that Indians never feed either their horses or their dogs. The dogs fight over the bones and scraps of the camp and steal what they can, while the horses shift for themselves in all kinds of weather.

“To be the horse or the dog of an Indian is surely a hard life, for Indians have no such feelings as mercy toward an animal.”

Again the three men gazed intently at the half wild herd. No herders were visible, but the herd was so compact that the trapper thought some one must be keeping them together.

“Look, boys,” Stone called after he had used his glass on the herd, “look sharp at the animal just coming out from behind a gray on the right hand side of the herd! I’ll wager my fur cap, he is no Indian pony.”

“I see him, I see him!” Ben cried. “It’s Grunter, Mr. Stone. Sure it is! It’s the big bay we dragged out of the quicksand in the

Platte. Look at him, Sam. Don't you see him? Dick rode him, when he and Al went on their last elk hunt!"

The next hour was the longest Ben had ever spent, since he had to stay in during the noon recess for bringing a bullfrog to school back in Illinois. There was no doubt that the big horse in the pony herd was Grunter, the abandoned horse from the Platte. The glass not only showed clearly his color and the way he walked and held his head, it even brought out the white spot on his forehead.

"But where is Al's black?" Ben wondered. "He and Grunter always stayed together."

"If the black," suggested the trapper, "was as willing a saddle-horse as you told me, some big Indian most likely rode him to death."

Both Sam and Ben were now in a flurry of excitement, for every minute they expected Al and Dick to appear near the herd. At one time Ben thought he saw them in a clump of poplars, then he thought they might be watching the herd from a grove of pines, or they might have sought shelter from the cold wind in a wooded gully. The minutes ran away

into hours, the sun had almost reached the noon point, but of Al and Dick or any other herder there was no sign.

"I wish," exclaimed Ben impatiently, "I could go and scout around the herd. I bet Al and Dick would be pretty scared, if I crawled up on them and yelled, 'Indians! Run, boys!'"

"That is a fine idea, sonny," the trapper granted with a sly smile at Sam. "You go and do that. Life at the Indian camp must be getting a little dull by this time. Sam and I promise to crawl up and listen to the drums and the yelling at the scalp-dance they will have in honor of your hair to-night. It is just the right length to be yanked off quick, and they know how to do it."

Ben ran his fingers through his hair and for some time bravely controlled his impatience, but very soon, when three Indians came from the north with some ten or twelve strayed ponies, all his hopes were shattered. There could be no doubt about the three herders being Indians, for the trapper's glass plainly showed their brown faces and jet-black hair.

The trapper was the only one not keenly disappointed at this discovery.

“To tell you the truth, lads,” he informed his young friends, “I did not expect to find the boys guarding the pony herd.

“The Indians have all had experience with captives, and they know quite well that captives in charge of ponies could not help thinking of the possibility of catching a fast horse and trying to escape.

“Two lads like Al and Dick who do not know the country, would of course have a very poor chance to make a safe escape, but if the attempt was well planned and timed and luck and weather were favorable they might get away.”

“How would you escape from Indians, Mr. Stone?” Ben ventured to ask.

“Well, boy,” the mountaineer replied smiling, “that is a pretty hard question to answer, but I don’t think they could hold me unless they tied me up or watched me every minute day and night.

“If I had a chance I should catch two fast horses. I should ride one till he was tired and then I would change to the other. I

would start in the evening and it would be travel, travel day and night for about two days, and I should strike across the country and keep away from their trails. But you see we old trappers know these mountains and valleys better than the Indians know them."

"Perhaps Al and Dick have already escaped," Sam suggested. "Al would not be afraid to take a chance."

"If he is as cautious as he is brave, he has not tried it," the trapper explained. "The grass is not out yet, the trees and bushes have no leaves, and as large a camp as this one can send men in pursuit in every direction."

Sam and the trapper agreed that staying any longer in this place would be useless. They felt sure now that they had found the camp of the Arapaho Blackfeet, who had captured the two white lads near Independence Rock. But how they might discover a clew to the exact whereabouts of the two captives seemed an unsolvable problem to Sam and Ben.

But Rufus Stone looked as happy and seemed as unconcerned as if he were taking

his boy friends on a camping trip through the mountains. Just now he was amusing himself with trying to drop pebbles into a pool in a small stream about sixty feet away.

"When I was a boy," he mused, "I used to be able to knock off the black walnuts pretty fast from the big trees in Illinois and Indiana. But there are no walnuts and butternuts in these mountains, nothing but the little hazelnuts which the chipmunks can carry in their cheek-pouches.

"Well, boys," he continued, as he sat down, "I reckon we didn't do so bad in our scouting. Hunting for men is a good deal like hunting for game, only more difficult. You have to keep going till you find something.

"Let us trail up the valley a little farther. Then, if we find nothing, we had better cross over to the other side of the ponies and pick our way a little closer to the big camp."

They had not gone far, when they came to a small stream, which the trapper pronounced to be a beaver stream, for several peeled beaver sticks were caught in a pile of driftwood.

Following the stream up, they soon found a

beaver pond, but the dam was broken and the house had been opened by trappers. However, the work was quite fresh, not more than a week or two old.

"Nothing here," was the brief comment of Stone. "Let us go on."

About a mile beyond they came to another stream, which, in addition to signs of beaver, showed some fresh moccasin-tracks on a trail along the creek.

"Get back in the brush," cautioned the trapper, "and follow me as quietly as possible."

Some ten rods up-stream the trapper returned to the trail at the foot of a large beaver pond.

Here he stopped and carefully looked at the ground. The soft mud at his feet was covered with plain, fresh moccasin-tracks, large and small.

The dog, who on the long journey thus far, had quietly followed the men, suddenly became interested in the tracks. He smelled at them, and whined, and was going to follow the trail.

The trapper quickly tied a string of buck-

skin to the dog's neck and said in a low voice: "Search him, Prince! Find him!"

Impatiently the dog strained at the cord, so the trapper could hardly follow him.

Near the head of the pond, he broke away, rushed straight across a beaver clearing to a brush camp, where he barked aloud and jumped and danced around as if in great joy.

Stone and the boys followed him as fast as they could, and there under a brush lean-to they came face to face with two ragged, bare-headed boys, who had just been skinning a beaver, when Prince had broken in on them.

"Don't make a racket, boys, don't make a racket," the old trapper cautioned at the general mix-up of boys and dog.

Al and Dick were so changed and in their long hair and tattered clothing looked so much like wild men, that Sam and Ben had for a moment hardly recognized them.

"You must get away, get away quick!" Al whispered as soon as he could speak. "Chief Black Panther, for whom we are trapping, always sends his young men after the skins about this time of the evening. They will be here any minute. Go away, quick! Black

Panther's camp is only a mile away, at the mouth of the creek. We are all in great danger."

"Come along, boys, come, Prince," the old trapper called. "We'll hide in the woods and come back after dark."

CHAPTER XXXII

TRAVEL, TRAVEL!

THE old trapper and his boys ate their supper far enough from the brush camp so that the dog could not betray them by any possible impatient whining to the young Indians, who came after the skins, when Al had just had time to obliterate the tracks of their dog friend who had found them.

The trapper had taken the precaution of tying Prince securely to a tree, for the excited dog could not understand why he should again be separated from the friends he had just discovered. He would hardly eat his share of pemmican, and again and again he sat up, looked in the direction of the brush camp and whined piteously as if he would say: "Why can't I go back to them?"

When it was quite dark, the trapper started cautiously for Al and Dick's camp. Prince was held in leash by a double cord of buckskin, so he could not break away again and possibly cause trouble.

Not until Stone had satisfied himself that the young Indians had not become suspicious and were hiding near by, did he approach the camp.

“We are all right!” Al whispered joyfully. “They never suspected a thing, but took the skins and walked straight back to camp. I watched them so as to make sure. If they saw any tracks of Prince, they thought they were made by some of their own dogs, who sometimes come up here to get some beaver meat.”

“All right, boys,” Stone began to urge them. “This pond is trapped out. Let us move your outfit. But you had better pack up a load of this fresh beaver meat. We are just about clean out of grub, and we are going to travel pretty lively for a few days without taking time to hunt. We trappers don’t think much of beaver meat, when there is plenty of buffalo and venison in camp, but it is very good meat, all the same. It’s always fat and juicy and as tender as good chicken or veal.”

Then turning to Al and Dick with a critical look, he continued: “Here, boys, put on

these new moccasins. I noticed yours are full of holes. When we get across the mountains, I'll have my men fix you up with new suits of buckskin; for you fellows have been rotten poor tailors. But you're all right to travel in the dark.

"Now follow me. Be careful so you don't break a leg or sprain an ankle, and when you get tired let me know. I reckon we all want to get out of the country without loss of time. It would be a fine country if there weren't any Blackfeet in it."

The old guide did not go very fast, but he kept going without rest for an hour or more at a time. He avoided all trails and seemed to follow the direction of the Big Hole Valley downward till they had passed the slope, where the ponies had been seen and also the site of the big camp.

About midnight they crossed the river, and after resting a short time and eating a bite of pemmican, he struck out straight across ridges and streams for the camp of his men on the Jefferson Fork.

When the first sign of daylight appeared on the sky, he stopped in a thicket of young

pinces, where the forest came down quite far into a valley.

"I think, boys," he said, "we had better lie low here to-day. If any danger appears, we can vanish away into the timber on the ridge above.

"We have enough pemmican and jerked meat to last us to-day, and you boys may take a good sleep, so you are ready to travel another night.

"If I don't miss my direction we ought to reach my men on the Jefferson to-morrow night."

"Why could we not go on traveling to-day?" asked Al. "Black Panther will not know till to-night that we are gone."

"That is where you take a chance and may be mistaken," the old trapper remarked. "It is quite possible that some one might pass your camp this morning and find that you had fled. In that case, if we should be seen, a number of them would soon be on our trail. And you must remember that our pursuers would travel on horseback and would soon overtake us. But if we do not show ourselves, they are most likely, as I figure it out,

to start in the direction of the nearest Hudson Bay post."

In order to find a place still more safe, they traveled up hill across the first ridge and half way up the slope of the second ridge, and made their camp in a place from which they could, like a wild mountain sheep, watch the country below. Here the old guide roasted some beaver meat over a fire of dry sticks, whose smoke, he felt sure could not be seen in the mist that was hanging over the pines. The boys, although they had not complained, were dog-tired, as Ben put it, and Al and Dick thought they had never tasted anything so good as the hot, sweet tea to which the old man treated them.

In the Blackfoot camp, tea and sugar had been unknown, and Al and Dick had even been on short meat rations all winter until the chief had sent them out to catch beaver.

After their warm breakfast the boys felt so much revived that they urged their guide to push on.

For a while the old mountaineer listened to them in silence, but when the lads had exhausted their arguments he gave them some

new points on the Indian game, as he called it.

“Let me tell you, boys,” he began, “I wish to push on worse than you, but many good men have gone under in this Indian country because they played the game wrong. They act as if they knew that things would take the best turn for them, but a man ought to act as if he knew that things would take the worst turn for him.

“You see if Black Panther learns of your flight this morning and sends runners out in all directions, one of them would be quite likely to discover us; and once discovered we should have a hard time to get away.

“I think we had better take a good rest here to-day and travel again to-night. That is the safest plan and would give us a start of them of about sixty miles.”

“How far will one of those Indian runners go in a day?” asked Dick.

“I have never had a chance to time one,” replied the trapper, “but from the way I have known them to get news from one camp to another, I believe they make a hundred miles a day.”

When the sun had set, the party again

started for the Jefferson Fork, and although Stone was nearly sixty years old, the boys had all they could do to keep up with him.

Soon after daylight they reached the camp on the Jefferson but to their great disappointment it was deserted.

On a pole the men had left a note: "Some blasted grizzlies cleaned us out of grub," it said. "We have gone to the foot-hill camp."

"The same old story!" Stone gave vent to his anger. "I suppose the whole crowd went up the creek fishing. They got tired of waiting just like a gang of boys. If some of them had stayed in camp, as I told them to do, the bears could not have stolen their meat. It's too bad one can't give these fellows a spanking when they deserve it."

They were now so far ahead of any runners the chief might have sent out that Stone felt it was safe to continue their travel.

The endurance of the old guide was a marvel to the boys. With long, slightly swinging steps he led the way hour after hour without a sign of fatigue.

"Dick," remarked Ben as he scrambled along in the rear, "do you remember that

story in our reader about the man with the seven-league boots? I think Mr. Stone has got them on. I'll be mighty glad when it's time to rest for lunch."

In the afternoon the guide killed another porcupine, which, he said, would give them enough meat till they reached the foot-hill camp.

"I hope," he added, "that bunch hasn't also cleared out."

They reached the foot-hill camp at midnight, and great was their joy to find the men and horses safe, and as great was the joy of the men to see their leader return safe with the two lads rescued from the Blackfeet.

The camp cook soon set out a meal such as Al and Dick had not eaten since they had left their hunting camp in the sand-hills. There was fried pemmican and dried meat, fried beaver and broiled porcupine, with sweet coffee and corn bread, the greatest luxury of all.

While the travelers were eating as if they had just broken a three-day fast, the men sat around the low fire and Stone told how they found the boys, and Al had to relate again

how he had mystified the Blackfeet with the horseshoe magnet, and how a boy who spoke a little English had told him where their captors expected to winter. They had gone up to the Big Hole because they were afraid of the Crows.

"Too darned bad," the boys heard one of the men say just before they fell asleep, "that you couldn't bring back a few scalps. Here we've been in the mountains near two years and nothing but beaver and marten and such to show for it."

"Jack Peel, you unregenerate old heathen," Stone chided the speaker, "you ought to be glad that you brought your own scalp back from the Jefferson. And I just want to tell you men, I have a feeling that we are not through with those Blackfeet.

"We shall pull out of this place at daylight. Thank God, we got away safe as far as we did. It was the riskiest piece of work I ever undertook in these mountains."

CHAPTER XXXIII

A BIG FIGHT

IN the morning Stone urged his men to be ready to depart as soon as it was light enough to follow a trail.

“If Black Panther’s men once discover the deserted camp on the Jefferson,” he warned them, “they can’t help finding our trail, and we don’t want to give them a chance to ambush us on the pass across the divide.”

To the boys, especially to Al and Dick, it seemed like a dream that they were once more in the saddle traveling swiftly and safely in a company of white men to whom fear and anxiety appeared to be unknown.

There was no longer any crawling through the brush in the manner of a hunted fox, no longer any talking in whispers and anxious searching of the country for signs of danger.

Boldly and openly the line of horsemen followed the trail, stories were told and jokes and jibes were bandied about.

Although the four lads were more than once referred to as a bunch of durned fool kids, the men really admired very much their grit and daring in the face of danger.

Al and Dick especially came in for a great deal of good-natured banter.

"If Joseph in his coat of many colors," remarked one of the jokers, "looked anything like you fellows with all your fancy patches on, I don't wonder his brothers chucked him in a well."

"Oh dry up, old Beans," a friend corrected him, "quit showing off your black ignorance. They didn't chuck him in a well; they chucked him in a dry pit."

"You kids are sure a fine pair," came in another man. "I bet a pack of beaver, you fellows would take first prize in a tramp show on the water front at old St. Louis. I swear some of us will have to ride ahead to tie up the dogs, or they will never let you come into camp."

Although the men were all desirous of reaching the camp in Pierre's Hole as soon as possible, they could not travel fast enough to suit their leader.

“Jab their ribs a little bit, boys,” he urged again and again. “Don’t let them loaf; this isn’t a pack train. Keep them going.”

In reality the horses were going as fast as the conditions of the trail allowed, because the horses as well as the men wanted to get back to the home camp.

“The captain has got it bad,” remarked one of the men to Sam, “but he can’t help it. I believe he would say, ‘Keep them going, boys, keep them going!’ at a funeral. But we all swear by him. We never lost a man or a pack of beaver when he was around. Did you ever hear that the old man can smell Indians?”

Sam had not heard it.

“Well, he can,” continued the speaker. “He never said so himself, but we all believe it.”

Just then Stone came up from the rear, where he had been watching the back trail.

“I shall be very glad,” he said, as he joined Sam, who had waited for him, “more than glad, when we reach Pierre’s Hole. Ever since we reached the Jefferson, I have had a feeling that we are being followed and that we are in danger.

"I don't think I am afraid of Indians, but I have a horror of fighting them while traveling. They nearly always manage to make a surprise attack, and one is almost sure to have some killed and wounded, and you cannot take care of the wounded on the trail."

It was only to rest the horses that a short halt was made at noon, then the train pushed on until near midnight; and at dawn of day, every man was again in the saddle.

By thus driving both men and horses to the utmost, the train reached the home camp at noon on the second day.

The welcome which Stone and his followers received was truly uproarious. Had any Indians been within hearing, they would have thought that there was a grand scalp-dance going on in the white men's camp.

Stone had planned to break camp and start for Fort Hall on the following day, but to his chagrin this was found impossible, because Dave Harrington with five men was away trapping beaver and would not return for three or four days.

In the evening the men planned to celebrate the arrival of their leader and friends in true

mountain style. Stone consented to this plan on condition that the horses were all brought into the corral and that the camp guard be doubled, and that the grand powwow close at midnight.

The men demurred against these restrictions, but the leader was inflexible.

“We have to do it that way,” he told them, “or we can’t have the powwow.”

Several times during the evening Stone slipped out of the big tent, to make sure that the guards had not deserted their posts, for a surprise attack by Blackfeet would put a sad and horrible end to the feasting, singing and mock scalp-dance.

The feast over, Stone ordered the double guard to be kept up during the night, and he felt much relieved when the day broke without any signs of danger having been discovered by the guards.

After breakfast the horses were driven out in charge of two men, but some ten fast horses were, as usual, kept in the corral ready for instant service. As it was necessary to cut poplar brush and bark for these animals, the men had often grumbled against this plan,

but in this matter, too, the good-natured leader was inflexible.

“What’s the good of a horse a mile or two off on the prairie, when you want one in a hurry?” he reasoned with the men.

“Ten good horses in the corral at all times, that’s the rule in this camp. Any man who does not like it, can take his share of the furs and leave us.”

When, on the morning after the feast, the horses were about a mile from camp, some half-dozen Indians jumped out of a gully, and by yelling, as only Indians can yell, and by waving blankets and buffalo robes started most of the animals on a wild stampede.

It was only with the greatest difficulty that the two herders saved about a dozen horses and at the same time beat off the attack of the Indians, some of whom were armed with Hudson Bay guns and some with bows and arrows.

No sooner was the shooting heard than the cry of “Indians!” rang through the camp; and ten good riders ran to mount the horses left in the corral and, with Stone as their leader, raced after the stampeded herd.

“Don’t drive your horses too hard!” the leader warned his men. “We have to follow their trail, till we get those horses back!”

As soon as the mountaineers had overtaken the raiders, there began a deadly fight. Each man singled out an Indian. On their swift fresh horses, the trappers overtook the wiry Indian ponies one by one, passing each one on the right, and dropping the naked rider with deadly aim. By this strategy the fleeing Indian was compelled to stop and turn around in order to discharge his gun or arrow at his pursuer with any effect. The two foremost Indians, when they saw how badly the fight was going against them, deserted their horses and escaped into the timber along a small stream, where the trappers could not follow them.

While this fight was going on some six miles or more from camp, the men and the boys who had remained there had even a more stirring time of it.

“Look out, men,” Stone had called to them, as he dashed away, “don’t fall into a trap. Stick to your fort!”

For a while, after Stone and his men had

left, everything remained quiet, and the men began to think that some more of them should ride after the stampeded herd.

Then, suddenly, from a copse of poplars half a mile away, a host of naked, yelling demons broke forth. Straight for the camp they came, as if they would drive their horses right over the primitive breastworks of the trappers and in amongst the lodges and tents. But when several of the men could not restrain themselves and fired at the foremost raiders, the whole yelling horde swerved and rode around the camp at a safe distance.

After they had held a council, they again started riding around the camp, yelling in a most fiendish manner and brandishing their spears. Gradually they drew closer and began to shout insults at the trappers, about whose number they were much in doubt.

“They are coming too close, men,” Alders called out. “Give them a pill, half of you!”

At the discharge of the guns, two Blackfeet dropped off their horses, and the trappers raised a shout of defiance.

The Blackfeet picked up their dead or wounded, but soon returned, for another

charge. This time, a chief on a swift, black horse was leading them, and they came on with a wild rush. But the trappers were so well acquainted with Indian tactics that this time they held their fire until almost every shot took effect.

With a mad cry of despair the Blackfeet fled, leaving most of their fallen behind. Evidently the number of trappers was greater and their fire much more deadly than the Indians had expected.

But the Blackfeet were always bitter enemies of the whites and hard fighters in battle. They now rode back to the cover in the poplars, from which they soon swarmed forth on foot and tried to approach the fort under cover from all sides.

"Don't shoot wild, men!" Alders called out. "Make every shot count. Remember, we have no ammunition to waste!"

And both men and boys made every shot count. Wherever they saw a head, they took careful aim at it. But some of the Reds soon gained such good cover that they could not be dislodged. Two of the trappers were already wounded, several of their horses had

been killed, and things began to look desperate for the few able-bodied white men left.

"Get your pistols and hatchets ready," Alders ordered. "If they come any closer, we have to make a rush at them, or they will kill every one of our horses."

The fight now became a regular siege. If a trapper showed his head, a bullet or an arrow was sure to come for him. The Indian bowmen became especially troublesome, because it was difficult to locate them. Another horse was killed and several more were wounded. Alders would have ordered a charge, but he felt sure that in that event, they were almost sure to lose one or more men, and that both of the young boys were likely to be killed.

Now one of the men was seriously wounded by an arrow, and Alders peered with anxious eyes in the direction from which he expected Stone and his men to return. If they did not return very soon, he would have to order a charge, for the men refused to be restrained any longer. "But God only knows," he thought; "perhaps they will not return." And again he held the men in check for an anxious, long half hour.

Then a horseman approached in the distance, and another, and another.

"They are coming, boys! They are coming!" Alders called out. "Give the Reds a shot, half of you, so our men will know that we are surrounded."

At the sound of the guns, the riders fell into full speed, and approached with defiant hurrahs.

When the Blackfeet found themselves between two fires, they all broke for the cover of the poplar thicket like so many scared rabbits. Stone and his men as well as the men and boys in the fort rushed after them regardless of danger. The Indians in wild confusion fired their guns, but not one of them had time to reload his piece. Some were able to mount their horses, while others scurried into the timber on foot, but over a dozen remained dead in the brush and on the open meadow between the trappers' camp and the timber.

In a very short time it was all over, and the men returned to camp with shouts of triumph. And an hour later, four of Stone's party brought in the recovered horses.

314 THE SHAWNEE'S WARNING

It had been a terrible fight, and although none of the trappers had been killed, seven were wounded, two of them quite seriously, and several arrows had to be cut out.

Both Ben and Dick had had bullets and arrows whistle dangerously close to their heads, and Al had an arrow sticking in his shoulder.

There was no sleep in camp that night. Some of the men stood guard, and Stone did not have to urge them to keep a sharp lookout. The wounded were carefully tended, and the men not on duty performed a real scalp-dance. It was a truly weird though joyful night, such as Ben and Dick had not pictured in their wildest dreams.

The next day Harrington and his men returned, and were much disappointed that they had missed the big fight.

Within a few days, as soon as the wounded men were able to travel, both trappers and boys bade farewell to the scene of their happy winter camp and terrible fight, and started for Fort Hall.

"Let us travel," Stone advised, "while the traveling is good. I know that there has

been much howling, and slashing of bodies and cutting of fingers in the Blackfoot camp; but as soon as they get over their mourning, they will again come spying around this place.

“Well, we shall turn Pierre’s Hole over to them. We have enough beaver, and I guess we have all seen enough mountains and more than enough of Indians.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE END OF THE TRAIL

AT Fort Hall the four lads bade farewell to their friends and benefactors.

Most of the men returned to St. Louis with their leader, while the boys continued their journey to the Far West.

One small pack of beaver-skins Stone promised to deliver to Moquah, the old Shawnee, on the Big Blue.

"Tell the chief," Sam requested, "that the white boys wish him to sleep under a warm beaver robe, when the frost has hardened the ground.

"Tell him also that we met the Blackfeet and fought them in battle like men, that I carried his medicine with me to the Willamette, and that after many moons and winters we expect to meet him again in the white man's heaven."

When the lads reached the Hudson Bay post of Walla Walla on the Columbia, they

made a side trip to Waiilatpu, the station of Marcus Whitman, who supplied them with everything they needed until they would reach the great Hudson Bay post of Vancouver, on the lower Columbia near the present city of Portland, Oregon.

The journey from Vancouver to the American colony on the Willamette was like a holiday trip as compared with the long trail behind them. When they reached the settlements near the present city of Salem, Oregon, they were greeted as though risen from the dead; for parents and friends had given them up as lost, when they had not arrived by the close of the year.

In the numerous Indian wars, which began in 1847 with the Cayuse war, waged against the Indian murderers of Dr. Whitman and his family, both Ben and Dick served their new home State until fighting Indians became a very unromantic business with them; for these wars did not cease until the savage Modocs were subdued in 1873.

The dog Prince arrived at the Willamette somewhat footsore, but with his fighting spirit undiminished.

To the missionaries he would have been a very undesirable companion, because his prejudice that all Indians and Indian dogs were bad could never be changed. For more than one Indian dog, Ben had to pay with good white flour and beef, and on numerous occasions he had to tie him up hurriedly so he could not start war against peaceful, Christian Indians. But Ben and Dick loved the big Dane all the more for his very faults.

HISTORICAL RETROSPECT

The first white men who explored Oregon, after the memorable journey of Lewis and Clark, were employees of the Hudson Bay Company and American trappers and traders, but the American traders could not succeed against the powerful British monopoly.

For about half a century the great region embracing Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and British Columbia was held jointly by the United States and England. Little was known of the far-away wilderness, which was considered unfit for white settlers.

However, about 1832 occurred an event

which aroused the missionary zeal of the people of the United States.

One winter day four Nez Percé Indians appeared on the streets of St. Louis. In those days Indians from the Plains were no curiosity at St. Louis, but these four Indians had come two thousand miles from beyond the Rocky Mountains, through many hostile tribes; and they had not come to trade or beg or secure strong drink, they had come to learn of the white man's God and find the white man's Book of Heaven.

It seems strange that they should have failed to find in St. Louis what they were seeking. Two of the messengers took sick and died. When the two survivors paid a farewell visit to General Clark, whose visit of thirty years ago they still remembered, one of them made a speech, which by its deep, childlike pathos, appealed to the heart of thousands of Christian men and women.

"I came to you," the speaker said, "over a trail of many moons from the setting sun. You were the friend of my fathers who have

all gone the long way. I came with one eye partly opened for more light for my people, who sit in darkness. I go back with both eyes closed. How can I go back blind, to my blind people? I made my way to you with strong arms, through many enemies and strange lands, that I might carry back much to them. I go back with both arms broken and empty.

“The two fathers who came with us—the braves of many winters and wars we leave asleep here by your great water and wigwam. They were tired in many moons, and their moccasins wore out.

“My people sent me to get the white man’s Book of Heaven. You took me where you allow your women to dance as we do not ours, and the Book was not there. You took me where they worship the Great Spirit with candles, and the Book was not there. You showed me the images of good spirits and pictures of the good land beyond, but the Book was not among them to tell us the way.

“I am going back the long, sad trail to my people of the dark land. You make my

feet heavy with burdens of gifts, and my moccasins will grow old in carrying them, but the Book is not among them.

“When I tell my poor, blind people, after one more snow, in the big council, that I did not bring the Book, no word will be spoken by our old men or by our young braves. One by one they will rise up and go out in silence. My people will die in darkness, and they will go on the long path to the other hunting-grounds. No white man will go with them and no white man’s Book to make the way plain. I have no more words.”

Only one of the Indians returned to his people, his companion died of the hardships of the long trail.

But the appeal of the sad, old Indian was not lost. Jason Lee, Marcus Whitman, and other brave apostles of the Christian faith answered this strange pathetic cry from Macedonia beyond the Western Mountains, and they carried the light of the Gospel and the Book of Heaven to the tribes that sat in darkness.

And when the missionaries had brought to

the Indians the Book of the white man's Heaven, they carried back to their white brethren true knowledge of the Oregon country. They told of its great rivers and harbors, of its wonderful mountains and forests, and especially of its fertile soil and mild climate.

The information made public in speeches and in print by Jason Lee, Marcus Whitman, and many others, created a great interest in Oregon, and for about ten years, beginning at the time of our story, caused thousands of hardy American pioneers to make the long, overland journey from the Missouri River to Oregon.

One can not help asking, why did these people travel three thousand miles to Oregon, when the whole vast region between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains was still a wilderness?

The pioneers were urged on by several motives.

They were true Americans with the love of adventure bred in their blood. They were patriotic and wished to save Oregon for the

United States against the claims of England.

Moreover, while the farmers west of the Alleghanies could raise grain and meat and fruit in abundance, they had almost no market for their products, for the days of railroads had not yet come. So cheap were all the products of the farm that ears of corn were sometimes used as fuel on the Missouri River steamboats. From Oregon, on the other hand, ocean vessels could go to the Hawaiian Islands and to China and to Russian Alaska. And very soon the California gold fields furnished a most profitable market. The first shipment of Oregon apples reaching San Francisco sold for \$125.00 a bushel.

American trappers and fur-traders explored the Oregon country and acted as guides to the missionaries and immigrants. The pioneer immigrants built homes, schools and churches, and planted farms and gardens west of the mountains. In that way they saved for the United States the area now embraced in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.

In 1846 Great Britain accepted the 49th parallel as the boundary between the United

States and the British possessions, and in 1859 Oregon was admitted as a State into the Union.

Americans have always read with pride the stories of their great pioneers; Daniel Boone, Lewis and Clark, Kit Carson, James Bridger, and many others. We should also honor the memories and read with pride the stories of our great men of the Book, the heroes who carried the divine message of Peace on Earth and Good Will to Men: Jason Lee, Father De Smet, and Marcus Whitman, missionary, prophet, and martyr of Oregon.

THE END

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